The Position of Magic
in Selected Medieval Spanish Texts
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By

Francis Tobienne, Jr.

Cambridge Scholars Publishing
To the Tobienne family and friends; specifically, my mother who passed on the gift of reading well; my father, who instilled within me a genuine, responsible work ethic and drive; my brother, who taught me to take risks; and to Alexis E. Ramsey, Gilmer C. Cook, Ernest L. Gibson III, Jeffrey L. Jones et al. (you know why). Lastly, to Jesus—my hero.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank first and foremost my Chair and Thesis Committee members Shaun F.D. Hughes, Clayton D. Lein, and Michael A. Ryan for their combined laser-like examining eye, patience as well as their respect—I am truly honored to be in and under such company. I would like to also thank the Purdue University Libraries, Phillips Academy-Andover Oliver Wendell Holmes (OWHL) Library, and the Harvard University Widener Library for their research and reading space[s] where I found myself surrounded by books, articles, and friendly dust mites. Further, I would like to thank Dr. Richard Kieckhefer at Northwestern University for his outside readership suggestions and comments. Lastly, I would like to thank those who questioned me at coffee shops, in the halls of Heavilon Hall, en route to my classes, et cetera; your interest in my project ensured that perhaps I was on the right track, and reflected—where future projects merit—continued research; specifically, thank you to the Medieval Studies program at Purdue University and its outstanding faculty and Comitatus; thank you to Room 215, located in Heavilon Hall, and to those indifferent to my subject—I can only hope to be relevant to you one day. If I may, I would like to challenge myself, that in those years to come, in addition to this present project, I might hope to become just a little wiser, a little more patient, and as strong a scholar as those that were present at my committee defense; this book is an indication that I am heading in their direction, and moreover—they need, of course, no absolution for the shortcomings that remain.
The subject of magic and its study on the Iberian Peninsula differs considerably from observing magic as a mere object of inquiry. For this particular project, I am concerned with the subject of magic as it existed as a viable, intellectual pursuit of examination alongside other liberal arts and sciences such as: philosophy, mathematics, astrology, alchemy and even religion; specifically, Samuel Waxman in his *Chapters on Magic in Spanish Literature*, suggests that “It [“magic,” my emphasis] was even sometimes classed as one of the seven liberal arts” (1). Though this project does not concern directly the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium*, the bifurcated headings of the seven liberal arts, “magic” was still taught alongside these dual distinctions and supported what one historian called, “a canonical way of depicting the realms of higher learning.” In sum, magic became a way, and perhaps an association toward, an epistemological end.

Further, the goal of this project is to define and represent the ambiguity of magic and the tolerance of its expression in literature as its “definition” oscillated between religion and science; this medium exists within the literary exchange of Spanish Medieval Literature and its culture (the elements that aggregate into and express quasi-knowledge of a type of Spanish society). By examination, magic appears as the connection between religion and science, between belief (and belief systems) and praxis, or theory in practice regarding natural philosophy. Moreover, magic exists in the bifurcation of terms—white and black magic; the former has been closely linked in the thirteenth century as coinciding with *mirabilia* and *miracula*, or that which pertains to miracles, and the latter appears as—“black” or dark magic (*nigromancia*). As the increase of the dark arts became more prevalent, the Church retaliated by instituting its own version of magic, or explanations of supernatural phenomena. Still, the term *miracles* would do, and the practice, according to Jennifer Corry, was conceived as “white” magic. However, as we shall see such distinctions were not always easily ascertained. For example, the literature that captured such ambiguities best came from Spain in the form of the post-Aristotelian ideation of didactic and mimetic poetry. Spain had become Christian (albeit of the Arian variety) during the Visigoth Conquest (fifth century) but became a center of learning after the Muslim Conquest and Muslim, Christian and Jewish learning flourished there especially between the tenth
to the thirteenth centuries; Spain was the translating center for much science and the philosophy of ideas; i.e. Spain became a center for the translating of Arabic and Greek works into Latin, and then into Spanish. For this project I will concern myself primarily with the Spanish texts either in translation from the Arabic or Latin, and provide translations as necessary. I have privileged specific Medieval Spanish texts that attempt to showcase the aforementioned: the blurred lines of religion and science when magic is overt, or occult in its illicit manifestations; as found within the Medieval Spanish poetry of *Auto de Los Reyes Magos* and *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca*, respectively.

Before each chapter is a brief account of that particular chapter heading, followed by subsequent headings under that chapter. Again, the chapter-by-chapter analysis collectively informs the reader that the study of magic in thirteenth century Spain, and Spain’s acceptance of such aberrant practices (held so by the Church) that at times border on the comical, via the authorial intent of Spanish Literature. When compared and taken alongside, a vast survey of Literature ranging from the works of Saint Augustine to Alfonso X, the Iberian Peninsula demonstrates, albeit pre-Inquisition and witch craze (fifteenth thru the end of the seventeenth century), an acceptance of behavior regarding magic and its derivative practice[s] such as astrology, medicine, and sorcery; together, such behaviors served an explanatory role of the natural and super/supra-natural realm.
ABSTRACT

The position of “magic” as it existed in thirteenth century Spain “articulated,” via post-Aristotelian philosophical ideals, a rather subjective definition regarding the explanation of phenomena; “magic,” seemingly fit within the categories of religion and science, albeit such distinctions were further problematized as the subject of magic’s bifurcation received attention—namely, “black” magic and “white” magic; the former suggests the art of dark and demonic influence[s]; the latter concerns this project in particular as mirabilia and miracula—are examined in two poetic, Medieval Spanish accounts—the *Auto de Los Reyes Magos* and the *Vida de Santa María Egípciaca*. Here, magic relies on divine agency. Further, this project examines the literature that extends from Saint Augustine to Isidore of Seville and Alfonso X, el Sabio [or, the Wise]. It is the hope that this thesis, a launching pad for a larger work, may address the often blurred line[s] between such dual parallels as “magic and religion” as well as “magic and science.” Where discussion of either religion or science enters, I argue, that “magic,” the subjective explanation of phenomena in the suspension of the natural order[s], may in fact act as an axis point, or “gateway” into such a discursive praxis.
CHAPTER ONE

To begin, Chapter 1 briefly argues for an abridged history of white and black magic framed as a dialogical survey beginning with Saint Augustine and progressing toward the distinct voices of Stuart Clark, Karen L. Jolly and Jennifer M. Corry; moreover, such bifurcated distinctions involving magic are separated via the source or well-spring of power. A definition of “magic” will be developed between these bifurcated terms and their particular application via examples of “Science” and “Religion,” or an amalgam of these two belief systems.

A Rhetoric of Witchcraft, taken from Stuart Clark’s massive text, *Thinking with Demons*, will be applied to a tangential Rhetoric of magic of sorts in both the oral and written tradition, and will be utilized when discussing the primary texts, *Auto de Los Reyes Magos (Auto)* and *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca (Vida)* as well as the Latin treatise on magic known as the *Picatrix*. I am aware of the copious works written in Spain during the thirteenth century such as the *Libro De Alexandre*, *Berceo*, *Libro De Apolonio*, *Calila E Dimna*, *Poema De Fernán González*, and of course the *Gran Conquista De Ultramar*. These works interlace magic within a poetic framework, and have been dealt with in detail in the work of Antonio Garrosa Resina, but I have chosen the *Auto* and the *Vida* because these texts describe the affectation of magic in both religious belief and in applied science (Astrology); what is more, these texts exist as didactic and mimetic.

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1 For this project I am well aware of the literature and philosophy of the post structuralist and socio-historical critic Michel Foucault with regard to the subject of power and the respective power structures that exist to express and suppress this ideation; however, I am not referring to power in the Foucauldian and policing sense per se, but the distinction between Divine and D[evil]ish influence. The former concerns miracles and serves God, while the latter concerns demonic control and serves Satan; both have their place and rely on each other for clarification and perhaps even existence. As one critic has noted, a theology of angels can only exist and is made possible via a theology involving demons. For further reading on the subject, though later than our scope of the thirteenth century, see Walter Stephens’ *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), especially chapters 3 thru 5, 10-11, 13. Stephens’ accounts on the incubus and succubus are especially interesting and concern the subject of witchcraft from 1430-1550.
written forms. Moreover, upon the examination of such forms, magic as explanation of phenomena seems to blur the line between religion and science—respectively; specifically, the position of Divine agency via a human vessel as well as the “science” of the stars, or Astrology; arguably then, creating a parallel existence between magic and religion as well as magic and science.\(^2\) Seemingly then, one could argue that to “understand” religion (belief and belief systems) and science in the thirteenth century, one must also take into consideration, and enter through the gates of magic.\(^3\) What is more, I chose the following Medieval Spanish primary and anonymous texts: *Los Reyes Magos, Vida de Santa Maria Egipeciaca*, and supplementary texts such as the *Picatrix*, the *Lapidario* and *Los Siete Partidas*, of Alfonso X, *el Sabio* (the Wise, or the Learned One), which, taken together, provide commentary on thirteenth century medieval Spanish culture and the court of Castile-León.

\(^2\) An interesting work by Marcel Mauss, translated from the French into the English by Robert Brain, *A General Theory of Magic* (New York: Norton Co., 1972), examines the role of magic and the magician in the varied cultural landscapes that cater to its alignment with religion and science. At one point Mauss states:

- Words such as religion and magic, prayer and incantation, sacrifice and offering, myth and legend, god and spirit are interchanged indiscriminately.
- The science of religion has no scientific terminology […] However, our aim is not only to define words, but to set up natural classes of facts and, once we have established them, to attempt an analysis which will be as explanatory as possible. (7)

Mauss in making the attempt to disentangle such word and language uses to explain what he suggests *magic* to be, namely a “social phenomenon,” does so at the risk of over-theorizing. Still, the small volume is helpful to our study of magic and religion, especially his fourth chapter, “An Analysis and Explanation of Magic”. Here, he is concerned with magic being “continuous in nature” and its “efficacy” (91). Further, magic is believed and “like religion, is viewed as a totality” (92). In explaining magic, Mauss entangles his own rhetoric with that of a religious nature, and in fact suggests in an earlier place via influence of Frazer that religion stems from imperfect magic. Again, this is an intriguing investigation into the alignment of magic and religion. Lastly, in describing the “genuineness of magic,” Mauss posits, with respect to the magician that: “Indeed, his faith is sincere in so far as it corresponds to the faith of the whole group…magic is believed and not perceived” (97).

\(^3\) By no means am I strictly suggesting that we interchange the syntax of Religion with the syntax of magic, or the syntax of Science; i.e. terms such as the science of religion, or even religious magic, though they may exist, are highly dubious. Still, there is something to be said in disentangling each institution’s explanation of phenomena, and that is part and parcel of this present project. Magic appears to have what I call syntactical fluidity that depends on context, historical, literary, et cetera.
1.1 Language & Semantics: Signification and Ambiguity of Terms

It is difficult to assess an explanation of a belief, or a belief system in words, and harder still to assign signification to such inexplicable conviction[s]; however, as Saint Augustine (354-430 C.E.) has asserted in times past—words are themselves signs;\(^4\) further, such attached signification tends to hold, I offer, subjective interpretations. For example, in utilizing the law of contraries\(^5\) many dual subjects can be categorized and better understood in opposing classification; i.e. “hot and cold,” “yeah or nay,” “alpha and omega,” “good and evil,” and of course “black and white.” Each pairing requires knowledge of the other’s existence in order for the pair to reflect contrariety. Stuart Clark, in his massive study on witchcraft, Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe (herein, Thinking), suggests a motive for such prescriptive, dual classification. Clark posits that, “in the system of ideas that informed early Greek religion and natural philosophy, material flux and moral variety were traced to the interplay-sometimes the warring-of contrary entities in the

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\(^4\) This concept regarding words as signs is taken from Saint Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana (Books XIX-XXV), translated by R.P.H. Green, (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 47-54.

\(^5\) Isidore of Seville (c.560-April 6, 636) utilizes this concept, which develops from Aristotelian philosophy. Isidore accounts for such opposing binaries in his Etymologiae. The Latin text is edited as: Etymologiarum siue originum libri xx, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (1911. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957). There is now a complete English translation (including the relevant letters): The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). In his Latin text, “De Opponitis,” Isidore asserts:

Contrariorum genera quattuor sunt, quae Aristóteles ἀντικείµενα, id est opposita vocat, propter quod sibi velut ex adverso videntur obsistere, ut contraria; nec tamen omnia quae opponuntur sibi contraria sunt, sed omnia a contrario opposita sunt. (Lib. II xxxi; 15v)

There are four types of contraries (contrarium), which Aristotle calls ἀντικείµενα, that is ‘opposites’ (oppositum) because they seem to stand opposing one another as if face to face, as contraries. Still, not all things that are opposed (opponere) to one another are contraries, but all things are opposed by a contrary. (87-88)

Isidore’s entire section regarding the subject of contraries can be found in the Latin, Lib. II xxxi; 15v-16v, or in the English translation; pages 87-88 respectively. Such ideation was representative in the medieval community in which Bishop Isidore had inherited from his brother, Bishop Leander of Seville, who had promoted Aristotelian ideals throughout his career, and which were catalogued for lasting effect in Isidore’s aforementioned Etymologiae, the first medieval encyclopedia of its kind.
world” (Thinking 43). Clark continues to pay homage to such who held these views and their alternating [dis]ordering via the mention of Empedocles,6 Pythagoras,7 and of course Plato. In Plato (429-347 B.C.E.), Clark suggests that both the Timaeus and the Symposium are representations of “concordia discors in mathematical reasoning, musical harmony, physical health, moral improvement, and ultimately, the universal structure of things” (Thinking 43). These “things” could in fact provide clarification of the [un]seen world. Again, offering if nothing less an attempt at classifying magic as an explanation of phenomena.8

Specifically, Clark begins this elucidation by providing a Rhetoric of Witchcraft, or an attempt at language taxonomy regarding the ideation of witchcraft. It serves as perhaps an approach to the necessary disentanglement of the term magic. Clark begins by postulating “how language authorizes any kind of belief at all” (Thinking 3). What is more, this attempt is further problematized by the epiphenomenal impulses of other things; i.e. the explanation of phenomena is contextual and reflexive, wherein for one group it may symbolize ritual and religion versus for another assembly, distinct praxis and experimental science. Clark continues

6 Empedocles (ca. 495-435 BCE), was a physician, philosopher, and to some extent a poet. His central work On Nature concerns us here because of his use of opposites and his roots, or four elements: fire, air, water and earth; each element is moved by two opposing forces, ‘love’ and ‘strife,’ respectively.  
7 Pythagoras (ca. 571-c.a. 496 BC), or as Carl Huffman states, “the man who knew many things,” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online) positions the philosopher as a mathematician and mystic. According to Diané Collinson in her Fifty Major Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 2002), Pythagoras concerns us in this project because, as Collinson suggests, “The Pythagorean study of number and its relationship with the physical universe, and especially its relationship with music and astronomy, produced a strange blend of mysticism and real mathematical development” (9). Further, Collinson refers to the astronomical tendencies that were applicable via a Pythagorean understanding of music and harmony amongst the stars. She asserts, “He [Pythagoras] thought that the heavens were like a musical scale, that the stars produced harmonies and that souls at their best must be harmonious with the heavens” (9).
8 In utilizing the term phenomena I am adhering to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) for its range of meanings; i.e. A thing which appears, or which is perceived or observed; a particular (kind of) fact, occurrence, or change as perceived through the senses or known intellectually; esp. a fact or occurrence, the cause or explanation of which is in question (“phenomena [-non]”). This definition applied to a definition of magic is the purpose of my overall study on the explanation of white and black magic—respectively; or, miraculum and maleficium.
his investigation of language engaging in the idea of inversion, albeit another layering to this project’s suggestion of contraries, and asserts, “Thus inversion can have an estranging as well as clarifying role; it unsettles the very classification system that gives it meaning and does so in the same instant that that meaning is grasped” (28). Arguably, such explanation of phenomena amidst inversion or contrariety assists in the explanatory role as well as adding to its imperceptibility. Perhaps then, the role of “magic” and its classification continues to be ambiguous even in contextual spaces. Arguably, magic aligned well and within the infrastructure that comprised both religion and science, respectively. Clark continues his investigation for a Rhetoric of witchcraft in terms of values and dual classification and contrariety. Moreover, in terms of the comprehension of ideas, “opposites were said to require each other in order to form wholes and improve understanding” (40). Clark recounts such logic as operative in modern Europe:

In the primary opposition of good/evil, evil is needed as much as good. As the complement of good it complements the order of things; indeed, it makes the order perfect. The same must be true of demons and witches, who thus become both distillations of everything negative and, at the same time, vehicles of consummation. (41)

By Clark’s account then, the application of each element within the binary “good” v. “evil” is both actively responsible for each other, and registers its complementarity. Moreover, such a bold contention is not new, as it was taken into account in early modern Europe wherever the Church desired authority. Clark terminates his section on language with the ideation of contrariety and its universal appeal. He asserts, “Contrariety was thus a universal principle of intelligibility as well as a statement about how the world was actually constituted,” and again insists “this had implications for the way men and women used language” (54). Accordingly, this was not mere heuristic conventions at work, but as Clark suggests, “an imperative at

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9 Clark utilizes the term inversion with regards to contrariety and opposing binaries. He specifically engages with the role perception holds via the onlooker. Essentially, I take the term “perception” to function as a gaze upon context, and an examination given via language, or words attached with signification. Clark states, “Inversion too…was a feature of the world of sin, a world in which the negative qualities threatened to dominate their positive counterweights, and all things echoed the primal disobedience by reversing their normal roles and relationships” (Thinking 71). Clark assumes much here, with regard to such loaded terms such as sin and normal. Perhaps, this view of the world-turned-upside-down motif could in fact behave as a proviso to explanatory phenomena and other recognizable [dis]order.
work” (54). The shift from language to religion was not only inevitable in describing phenomena, but natural and pressing.

According to historian Richard Kieckhefer’s *Magic in the Middle Ages* (herein, *Magic*), “some of the classic anthropological definitions assume that religion and magic stand in relationship of binary opposition [...] religion is public and official while magic is private and unofficial” (x). Religion has a long and tumultuous history on its own and the formation of Christian doctrine itself not an easy matter to settle into mere words; it is not, however, the scope of this project to provide a detailed account of Religion, but simply to suggest that it served as one of the binaries in question against which a definition of magic is sometimes proposed. Of course, there are those who suggest, like Jennifer M. Corry in her *Perceptions of Magic in Medieval Spanish Literature* (herein, *Perceptions*), that the Church retaliated with their own version of magic in the form of white magic, or the explanation of phenomena via *miraculum*. Herein, we begin to note that what is at stake is not necessarily the term “magic” per se, but the source of power and influence at which an explanation of the [un]known hinges; i.e. demonic magic is dark, “black” magic for its invocation of demonic power and “white” magic is its opposite, because its source of power stems from God and the agents of the Divine. Hence, the syntax of magic, albeit an arbitrary term, perhaps is not assigned a “good” or an “evil” connotation until the source of power or cause of influence is determinable.

Consequently, black magic, or as Kieckhefer has stated, *nigromancia* or the black arts, as it is aptly ascribed, utilizes the invocation of demons and blackened spirits. The Church, seen as the light bringers and bearers of

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12 By mention of the Church I am carefully considering the position of an Institution in direct opposition to Heresy and Paganism. It is under this direct contentious binary that magic can be considered. There are two distinct threads that can be discussed here. The first, involves the Church against Paganism, that is, Paganism as an institution that is considered as a rival to the position of the Church and its affectations for promoting its belief and belief systems. The second, concerns that of the Church order that opposed the use of magic as means to uncover the secrets of Nature. Why? Because coercion of Nature by [a] force that is construed as [un]natural is in direct contradiction to Divine power and Divine influence. Yet, as we shall note when clergymen dabbled in these “arts,” distinctions of such practice[s] became considerably confused and ushered in the inevitable retaliation of Church
the good news, or the godspel, “good narrative” in Old English (which develops into modern English “gospel”) stood in direct opposition to the black arts, and retaliated with explanations of their own regarding the supernatural. Though Kieckhefer maintains that such binary oppositions, in studying medieval culture, are not necessarily helpful, I suggest that they may in fact provide some illumination with regards to how the participants in a medieval culture steeped in “magic” made sense of their everyday lives; i.e. through magic and its derivative forms and applications such as, conceivable explanations for crops going bad, the appearance of medical ailments and pestiferous, bodily growths, the onset of blindness and other maladies, and even looming, inclement weather patterns. It is this level of investment into the [un]known that could in fact provide the reasons to why people held specific beliefs and why, through the use of contraries were explanations not only foretold, but in some cases, as we shall see, demanded. Again, the wielders of such prescient arts were of some use to their respective culture[s], and could offer some indication of the medieval mind, and its direct affectation[s].

higher-ups to oversee and excise such behavior(s). Further, it suggests that magic could have very well been a part of religion and not necessarily outside of it; magic then, like other elements of theology, say angels and demons, is part of the world of Religion and from such binaries works towards an understanding of miracula versus nigrómancia, or angels versus devils. Here, I am not so concerned with the historical residue of Church vs. Paganism, though it may indeed exist, as applied to an Iberian thirteenth century, but the position of magic couched in terms of religion and science, and its affectation via its practitioner’s pre-witchcræze. Again, the relationship to be analyzed exists as magic and science as well as magic and religion. Still further, with regards to the term institution and the signification of “Paganism” and “Heresy” within these particular parameters a word or two may be in order. The Church is an institution as to some extent “Paganism” may also be considered an institution. “Heresy” is an institution only when it becomes organized like “Islam,” “Judaism,” or “the Cathars.” Otherwise, “Heresy” is the deviation of an individual from the teachings of the Church. This works only when “Heresy” and “Paganism” are capitalized and seen as “institution.” The Church and the individual acts are not opposites. Individual acts are opposed to this as that element of Church teaching. But the Church prosecutes these individual acts vigorously as they may grow into an institution as happened as a consequence of Martin Luther’s rejection of indulgences.

13 Richard Kieckhefer in his seminal work Magic in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), states: “I argued in this book that these binary oppositions are not helpful in studying medieval culture [...] and if we are to comprehend their (i.e. medieval clerics) culture it is important for us to know precisely how they supposed these practices worked” (xi). Kieckhefer suggests that the binary in question, religion and magic, are confusing set ups especially because these rational clerics would not confuse the two when explaining phenomena.
If opposites are indeed necessary for a more comprehensive explanation of one’s world, rather than existing in isolation, what then were the distinct accountings involving the binary of black magic and white magic? For some perspective, Stuart Clark puts forward that “the important point is that, since contrariety was thought to categorize the logic of the Creator’s own thinking, there was nothing to which it could not be applied... cosmological, ethical-social, and cognitive aspects” (Thinking 49). This application toward Church use is not a far stretch, but first, what of its dark counterpart?

In *Magic and the Middle Ages* (*Magic*) Richard Kieckhefer purports that “intellectuals in Medieval Europe recognized two forms of magic: natural and demonic” (9). These distinctions fall under the compartmentalization of science (early science at that) and *nigromancy* (necromancy, or learned magic arts).14 Kieckhefer, like Stuart Clark before him, agrees that demonic magic was “not distinct from religion, but rather a perversion of religion” (9). Likewise, the former type of magic, or natural magic was not distinct from science itself, but was “a branch of science” (9). With such

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14 It should be noted that early on its inception ‘necromancy’ and ‘nigromancy’ were quite distinct. The first part of the word *necromancy* comes from the Greek νεκρός, “corpse,” and involves calling up the dead or demons, and is a diabolical rather than a learned art. The first part of the word *nigromancy* is Latin, niger, “black,” and while it may involve a pun on *necromancy*, it refers to the “Black Arts,” and was in some circles taken as a positive term. In Book I, chapter III of the Latin *Picatrix*, it is described as follows: “Know that one calls this science nigromancy. We call nigromancy all that which a man brings about and at the end of which the intellect and the spirit are completely swept away by this process, and that with respect to the marvelous consequences by which one brings about that which the intellect observes through meditation and admiration.” Béatrice Bakhouche et al., ed. *Picatrix: Un traité de magie medieval*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 47.

‘Nigromancy’ involves the learned, magic arts, and by the end of the Middle Ages these two terms were indeed conflated. Richard Kieckhefer in *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) sheds some light with regards to both ‘necromancy’ and ‘nigromancy’ and he asserts:

One might suggest the term *nigromantia* not be re-Graecized as ‘necromancy’ but left as ‘nigromancy’. While in some respects preferable, this usage would mistakenly suggest that medieval usage distinguished between two terms. Both DuCange’s *Glossarium* (s.v. *nigromantia*) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. ‘necromancy’) make it clear that *nigromantia* was not a term distinct from *necromantia*, but an alternative version of the same word […] The equivalence thus conflated ‘black divination’ […] with ‘divination by consulting the dead’. (19)

Nevertheless, the evidence from early Medieval Spain, especially, the *Picatrix*, suggests that in this time and place the two terms are distinguished.
"distinctions" in place the main problem involves defining magic altogether. In other words: What exactly was it, and did it have a history; or: Was it part of the disentanglement of a larger belief system-religion and/or science. Arguably, as Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark have stated in their six volume edited series, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, “European magic beliefs and actions...have a long prehistory” and again, that “the field is virtually open since all history has a prehistory without bounds” (I: xi). Hence, the ultimate inquiry is Where exactly do we begin, and What are the reasons to do so. The following is a survey of examples, or stories that detail the subject of both black and white magic and their derivative affectation as well as a survey of various dialogues involving the defining of the term magic.

15 Of course we must be careful with such modern words when applying them anachronistically to a distant historical period; i.e. we must be aware that religion and science may be contraries only from a modern point of view. As such a medieval monastic “scientist” may not have readily seen the distinction. Arguably, such ambiguities further lend themselves to the complex subject of “magic,” which is easily encroached upon by and paired alongside with “religion” and “science” proper. 


17 Saint Augustine serves as a beginning point when defining the term magic. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine argues that “there are two types of learning in a pagan society,” and that furthermore, they exist via dual institutions, namely man[kind] and God (a position as we shall note later that Isidore of Seville supports in his *Etymologiae*). He purports:

One consists of things which have been instituted by humans, the other consists of things already developed, or divinely instituted, which have been observed by them [i.e. the pagans]. Of those instituted by humans, some are superstitious, some not. (Book Two, XIX, p.47)

Concerning the subject of magic itself, Augustine rules against consultation with or contracts among false idols and the establishment of false worship of the creative order. Specifically, “Something instituted by humans is superstitious if it concerns the making and worshipping of idols […] or if it involves certain kinds of consultations or contracts about meaning arranged and ratified with demons, such as the enterprises involved in the art of magic” (Book Two, XX, p. 48). Augustine’s invective against the practice did not stop here, but contained a polemic stance with regards to mathematics and astrology within the context of prescient advising; i.e. the art of magic leads the people astray. Moreover, Augustine is concerned here with Paganism itself as an institution. In full he claims:

We must not omit from this category of deadly superstition the people who are called gentilici because of their study of natal days, or now in common parlance mathematici [astrologers]. Although they investigate the true position of the stars at a person’s birth and sometimes actually succeed in
1.2 Black and White: Stories of Gray in Tales of Miracula and Maleficium

Jacob Bronowski enters the tête-à-tête of magic in his small volume, *Magic, Science, and Civilization* purporting that nature could be accessible via the right language. Bronowski further argues that it is best to do away with power-knowledge distinctions. He asserts, “above all you cannot make a distinction between power and knowledge, and that’s a central distinction that magic makes” (20). Bronowski further disassociates science from magic altogether and to that effect asserts:

I call everything magic which dualizes our view of the world […] if you say “open sesame” then nature will open for you; if you are an expert then nature will open for you; […] if you are an initiate there is some way of getting into nature which is not accessible to other people. (20)

working it out, the fact that they use it to try to predict our activities is a grave error and amounts to selling uneducated people into a wretched form of slavery. (Book Two, XX, p. 49)

The form of slavery in which Augustine makes reference to is submission to a preordained universe governed by the stars and allegiance to Mars or Venus rather than enjoying the freedom in a universe in which the individual has free will. Hence, in a final note, he urges, “So in all these teachings we must fear and avoid this alliance with demons, whose whole aim, in concert with their leader, the devil, is to cut off and obstruct our return to God” (Book Two, XXIII, p. 52). In short, Augustine equates any contract or connection with anything or anyone, outside the proper space of the Divine, via magic, as disruptive to the proper order or alliance which exists solely with God and not with devils. In another work Augustine directly challenges the belief of the Manicheans and sets up his counter-argument to the position of the term magic (*City of God*, Book X, Chapter 8 thru Chapter 12, herein expressed as X.8 followed by the respective page number).

Following Saint Augustine and his dialogues on the subject of magic, many added and attempted to define magic and its affectations. Such thinkers, though not an exhaustive list by any means, include Isidore De Seville (*Etymologiae*), Alfonso X (*Las Siete Partidas*), Robert Grosseteste (notions of creation *ex nihilo*), Roger Bacon (experiments as explanations of phenomena, specifically alchemy), Albertus Magnus (*De Anime in arte alchemiae*) and of course Saint Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* and his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*). Consequently, such members of their particular medieval intelligentsia shaped, challenged, and provided ongoing discursive measures for the comprehension of the [un]known and the [un]seen through a rational lens, and it is not without import that this is part of the impulse that gave rise to the establishment of Universities throughout Europe.
His reasoning is as ambiguous as his analysis; he states, “The form of magic that I shall discuss is the notion that there is a way of having power over nature which simply depends on hitting the right key” (20). If nothing else then, this analysis may help to point us in a formative direction regarding a beginning concept of magic over nature; i.e. where the natural realm is subservient to the powers that affect it, whereby left to itself, nature may not so willingly yield to its abuser. Moreover, who were these vessels who held the right key, suggesting that otherwise nature herself was perhaps…locked? Bronowski cites as an example, a witch (typical wielder of the dark arts) riding her broomstick backwards, suggestive of an aberrant behavior altogether with what he considers magic to have “a tendency…to turn nature upside-down” (21). Still, Bronowski did have something to say concerning white magic as the antithetical position of black magic. He states, “yes, there is a magic, but it is a natural magic, a white magic…no one knows quite how it works, but it attempts to extract out of the universe its own harmonies for our good” (31). Undoubtedly, Bronowski is alluding to Pythagorean ideals regarding the subject of planetary alignments and their harmonious intention to work with and within nature, not subjugate it. This, Bronowski suggests, is a step toward sympathetic, if not, appreciative science “as we understand it” (31). Until now, recent scholarship has suggested magic in other terms like a model of sorts rather than as an actuality.

In volume three, *The Middle Ages* of the celebrated series, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, scholar Karen Louise Jolly argues, “magic is more of a concept rather than a reality,” and that moreover, “the term is a way of categorizing a wide array of beliefs and practices, ranging from astrology and alchemy, charms and amulets, to sorcery and necromancy, trickery and entertainment, as practiced by both laity and clergy” (3:3). Jolly further argues that the label applied to phenomena via magic, science or religion was contextual; i.e. “certain practices in medieval Europe come to be labeled as magic, as opposed to scientific or religious, [and, it] depends on the perspective of the person using the label” (3:3). The focus of such a definition of magic carries with it Jolly’s ideation of alterity. She suggests, “Magic is most often a label used to identify ideas or persons who fall outside the norms of society and are thereby marked as special or non-normative, either for the purpose of exclusion or to heighten a sense of mysterious power inherent in their status” (3:6). Jolly, like Kieckhefer and others agree that medieval thought on magic and science is based on rationality; i.e. magic came to be seen as unsystematic, manipulative and irrational while science was affirmative and
rational in application. However, in the early Middle Ages as the *Picatrix* demonstrates, *nigromancy* was seen as an integral part of what we now call science, and in some sense was regarded as the culmination of it.\(^{19}\)

Jolly terminates her study by alluding to a paradigm shift regarding magic in the thirteenth century. She claims, “The official Church stance regarding magic shifted from a demonic association with paganism to a demonic association with heresy” (3:21). Arguably then, in the pre-thirteenth century when, the focus on the source of power, was seen to be demonic, “magic” was classified alongside Paganism because of its systematic threat to the Church. Hence, it is black magic that is spoken of here, and not white magic. To which she claims the former to be the dominant view, but the latter a conundrum of sorts. In her own words, “Why and how these forms [via the Church] of magic develop in this high medieval environment continues to be a puzzle” (3:23). Moreover, Jolly in her study, continues to look into the affectations of magic, such as: the uses of medical magic and the healing of the body and soul, ritual performance involving post-Augustinian notions of words and signs, the use of magic to ward off disease and natural disaster, acquired knowledge via astrology and divination from Nature, occult knowledge via sorcery and necromancy, and she even examines how magic can provide entertainment. In one example concerning the ambiguity of magic, Jolly cites Gregory of Tours (c. 538-c. 594) telling the story of St. Martin raising a tree that had fallen across the road by the signing of the cross. The people who witnessed such an event proceeded to scrape the very bark from off of the tree and dissolved its contents into some water to make a medicine. Apparently, such medicine could cure invisible ailments from “airborne poisons, elves, dwarves, or demons” (30). In some cases medical “magic” acting under the agency of medicine alleviated particular, sympathetic ailments; i.e. a popular example was the use of a vulture’s liver to heal those with liver complaints. Further, with application of medical magic the three most common complaints, according to Jolly, were “worms, bleeding, and childbirth,” (3:35) and these

\(^{18}\) Such distinctions and pairings concerning magic and science or magic and religion are confusing, but it should be noted that magic too could be held in rational, learned circles as is suggested by the definition of *nigromancia* given earlier; and, what is more, “magic” could also be seen as supplicative in prayer, but note that such entreaty was directed toward the Devil and not toward a benevolent Creator.

\(^{19}\) Jolly is generalizing about all of the Middle Ages (B.C.E. 750-1500) but privileging the latter centuries. Moreover, it is not a matter of “magic” being positioned with religion by clerical scholars who were engaged in research we would now call “magic.” For such scholars, such a distinction did not exist as the *Picatrix* makes quite clear.
three disorders benefited from such medical practices. What is more, accounts of saints spitting on leaves and applying mud to affected areas alongside the signing of the cross, produced a belief in their healing powers. Even the grinding of special stones into a drink with the heads of snakes to ward off enemies (usually demons) could be utilized. With respect to the affectation of words spoken during such magical rituals, Jolly states: “The basis for the power of narration lies in a particular view of language, that words represent reality and their performance can therefore alter reality” (3:39). Of further interest is the subject of magic as entertainment. Magic, as stated earlier held a position of entertainment, a position that tested the mind of its audience (in the guise of deception), but in reality challenged “ideas and human relationships” (3:66). Seemingly, this entertainment was non-threatening and couched magic in the frame of illusion, minstrels, acrobats, and involved an aristocracy “fascinated with automatons” (3:67); moreover, magic in general was seen as superstition and the lines of distinction between belief and itself were often blurred, regardless of its “soft,” or subtle utility. Moreover, if magic and belief were in communion—could the same solution work in tandem with science; i.e. could magic prove soluble in the water of experimental science?

Roger Bacon (1214-1292), a thirteenth century friar residing in England gained notoriety posthumously, and was termed by many as a sorcerer. Why? His practice of alchemy, the early beginnings of scientific experimentation resulting in modern day Chemistry, positioned him as a heretic. Though a friar of the Order of St. Francis, he spent his waning years in prison for promoting dangerous and demonic ideas, and died one year after his release (a fate reminiscent of that suffered by Galileo, another man of science in conflict with the Church). Still, Bacon held himself to the

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20 See also, Karen Louis Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Anglo Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Of strong interest is her story concerning the surviving Old English charms which need to be spoken/performed for them to be effective (as opposed to phylacteries or talismans where the mere presence of the written word is sufficient to effect a result).

21 I agree with Karen Jolly that magic as “entertainment” is a modern anachronism of sorts, and that such amusement often involved the space of the court. One example, posits the life of an astrologer, a master of arcane knowledge, who predicted the death of the woman whom the king (Louis XI, 1425-1483) had loved. The king, out of sorts, secretly prepared the death of this particular astrologer, and on the given day asked him to predict his own death. The clever astrologer responded by predicting his death three days before the death of the king, and as such the king was keen to keep this particular astrologer alive and well. A story, such as this one, reflects Jolly, “true or not, indicates the fragile balance between belief and doubt in the political context of magic” (68).
highest code of ethics when writing his works commissioned by Pope Clement IV; these works include the *Opus Maius*, the *Opus Minus* and the *Opus Tertium*. In his *Opus Tertium*, Bacon writes, according to G.R. Evans’ *Fifty Key Medieval Thinkers*, “What is the purpose of study?” (118). To which Evans suggests, “The utilitas philosophiae, the benefit or value of philosophy, must, he [Bacon] believes, be to theology, in encouraging the conversions of unbelievers” (118). Further, Bacon was such a staunch supporter of the faith that he is recorded with stating the following, “children should begin with the more straightforward books of Scripture […] rather than with such unedifying classical poets as Ovid” (118). Seemingly then, such clear dictates in support of the faith should surely not involve a man of the cloth alongside condemnation for heresy and incarceration. However, Bacon did have the knack for science and his rhetoric oftentimes confused the Church of his ultimate stance. For example, when addressing the subject of proofs and religion, Bacon asserts, “Arguments prove nothing unless they are supported by the results of experiments” (Evans 119). Further, such a claim seeks a balance that the Church was unwilling to settle upon, and Bacon, according to G.R. Evans, suggestively “balances ‘all the works of experimental science (*scientia experimentalis*) and other wonders (*mirabilia*)’ carefully against magical arts” (120). Bacon provides a snapshot of English thirteenth century ecclesiastical intolerance as well as the clergy’s invested position and interest in the practice of magic. More importantly, Bacon affords yet another contribution to the entangled dialogue between magic and science as well as between magic and religion. And due to the fame that was acquired *post mortem*, Bacon’s infamy was due more to superstition and hearsay rather than any consideration of his written materials.

In Part III of the *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Middle Ages*, Edward Peters in his first chapter, “Superstition and Magic from Augustine to Isidore of Seville,” opens with:

> Christian writers first encountered the Latin words *superstitio* and *magia* when Greek and Roman writers and rulers applied them to Christianity itself

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22 Pope Clement IV was born at Saint-Gilles on the Rhone, 23 November, year unknown; he died in 1268.
23 If by “stance” we can freely interchange such a term with “faith,” that encapsulated belief warranting thought and action in like vein to act via a higher standard, then Bacon not only possessed the fullness of such a stance—it overflowed into everything he accomplished and tackled, and yet the Church was not able to understand nor comprehend Baconian interfaith. Truly, he was a man before his time, and he was punished for it.
in their combined senses of divination, magic, secret and forbidden practices, and excessive religious fear. (178)

Peters’ statement is an accounting of an early usage of the terms “superstition” and “magic,” whereby those who wielded the terminology and regulated its signification ultimately gained; contrastingly, those who did not gain from such word privilege were often seen as other, and received a hegemonic labeling to reflect their alterity. Peters continues his point suggesting:

Christians in turn reversed the usage: for them, superstition referred to what they considered to be the irrational and false beliefs—that is, the ‘religions’—of all others besides Christians and, to a limited extent, Jews, although Christian scripture portrayed some Jews as magicians (Acts 13: 6-12; 19: 13-20) and the poisonous image of the Jew as sorcerer survived for a long time in later European thought. (178)

The use of “magic” here is polemical among Christians, Romans and any other religious group who might wish to malign their opponents; and Christians used it in their formation of an attitude toward heresy. Why? The stakes concerning the subject of magic were higher and the attack on it was inevitable. No longer was death, which took care of the corporeal entity, sufficient punishment. No, the spirit too had to be punished through anathema and excommunication, which it was believed consigned the spirit to eternal damnation.\(^24\)

Saint Augustine (354-430 C.E.), championed and influenced a Christian reliance and understanding on the distinction between the black arts and true religion; between magic and sensation; and even between \textit{miraculum} and \textit{mira}, which concerned the subject of wonders. Here, Augustine provides initial insight into, what seemed to him a needless bifurcation of magic as learned magic, or theurgy\(^25\) and low or fraudulent ritual. It did not matter.


\(^{25}\) Augustine references magic and sorcery alongside the subject of theurgy. In Book X, Chapter 9 of \textit{City of God} he asserts:

They [miracles] were achieved by simple faith and devout confidence, not by spells and charms composed according to the rules of criminal superstition, the craft which is called magic, or sorcery—a name of detestation—or by the more honourable title of ‘theurgy’. (383)
Magic, for Augustine, was an aberrancy altogether—regardless of the level of learning involved.\textsuperscript{26} Further, Augustinian thinking provided distinctions and definitions for miracles (\textit{mirabilia}), and provided once more both an explanation and grounding toward the formation of Church doctrine. In Book X, Chapter 8 of \textit{City of God}, Augustine makes his case for the use of miracles amidst the backdrop of the biblical story of Moses,\textsuperscript{27} the prophet of God and the magicians of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. He states:

The magicians achieved their effects by the use of enchantments and magical spells, the specialties of evil angels, that is, of demons; but Moses wielded a power that was as much greater as his cause more just, as he easily prevailed over them in the name God, the creator of heaven and earth, with the assistance of the angels. (Book X.8.382)

Augustine utilizes a pairing mechanism, suggestive of the law of contraries; i.e. he begins with the quasi-analogy: an evil angel is to demon and magic, as an angel is to God and a prevailing order. Moses is seen as the miracle worker, and such \textit{mirabilia}, or “miracles and many others of the same kind …” were intended to support the worship of the one true God,” and once more—such devotion was to be “achieved by simple faith and devout confidence, not by spells and charms composed according to the

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\textsuperscript{26} This discussion regarding the learned distinctions and applications of ‘high’ and ‘low’ magic and its justification are taken up in Saint Augustine’s works, most notably the colossal \textit{City of God} and the shorter \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}. I quote Edward Peters’ description of the Augustinian position in full here: Augustine took up the problem of superstition and magic again in his massive work \textit{City of God}, a vast meditation on human history and the ultimate purpose of human existence […] In book X.9, Augustine dismisses the pretensions of learned pagans that theirs was a purer and higher art than lowly necromancy or everyday private consultation of magicians, identifying both ‘high’ and ‘low’ magic as ‘engaged in the fraudulent rites of demons’. (183)

\textsuperscript{27} See as a beginning point Exodus 7:10 and follow the development of magic and miracle in subsequent chapters in Exodus 8 through 11.
rules of criminal superstition, the craft which is called magic, or sorcery—a name of detestation” (Book X.9.383). Clearly, Augustine is not in favor of the dark arts nor its praxis, but what about the subject of miracles itself. We have suggested that such a term was still needed to explain phenomena, or events that occurred beyond the natural, even though it may have been more a matter of semantics rather than substance; such events were said to be supernatural and concerned both mirabilia and miracula. Augustine further comments on the rhetoric applied to magic as well as the delusion of astrology and divination. For Augustine, the supporters of this magic do so “with the demons of delusion” (Book X.9.389), and yet “contrasted with these are all the miracles which are effected by divine power, whether by means of angels or [...] the one God, in whom alone is the life of blessedness” (Book X.12.390). Once more we return to the axis point regarding what can be considered dark magic versus white magic, a distinction in which even Augustine’s words prove supportive; i.e. it is a work or art through specific agency, or source of power. As a final thought concerning the subject of magic as it pertains to demons, Augustine posits the true role of God versus pseudo-divinity (ascribed to demon agency) as “they cannot be gods, or even good demons: they are either identical with that being who is called the Deceiver, or else they are nothing but a figment of the human imagination and perhaps a passing memory (Book X.13.389-90). Moreover, where Augustine provided a type of beginning point for Church examination concerning the explanation of phenomena, the extension of the subject continued without impairment, in the cataloguing works of Isidore of Seville.
1.3 Etymologiae: Bishop Isidore & the Classical Value of a Pre-History

Isidore of Seville (c.560-April 6, 636), in his encyclopedic *Etymologiae* attacks the subject of magic and superstition, but in the context, according to Edward Peters, of religious, synoptical preservation regarding “laws, rules and ecclesiastical legislation” (185). Hence, a definition of magic now enters into the realm of juridical and political discourse. Though Isidore contested Heresy and the schism between the Christians and the Jews, Pagan culture and practices, and comments on the subject of the magi with regards to his commentary on the story of Moses and Pharaoh’s magician, we are concerned here in particular with his views on astrology, a practice intertwined with the subject of magic that was held to portray, through divination, a revelation of sorts to understanding the future. But first, what kind of man (of God) was Isidore of Seville exactly? Perhaps, a look into his epistolary writings will provide not only a sketch of such an individual, but may even afford a forecast of the climate of Spain during this time period.

*The Letters of St. Isidore of Seville* (herein, *Letters*), translated from the Latin by Gordon B. Ford, and more recently by Stephen A. Barney et al., are representative of the great man’s heart and ethic in his striving for a good life, a *vita* steeped in the *veritas* of God and his people. As we shall note, Isidore received, what could be construed as ecclesiastical admonishment, 28

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28 In Joseph F. O’Callaghan’s *A History of Medieval Spain* (herein, *A History*), the character of Isidore of Seville is first approached through the shadow of his brother, Saint Leander, bishop of Seville (c. 578-599). By O’Callaghan’s accounts Saint Leander “was one of the most influential figures of the century” (*A History* 85). His main contribution concerned the preparation of a space for educating the mind and living the application of sound learning *bonus fides*. O’Callaghan suggests that:

By organizing a school at Seville for the training of the clergy and by building up a library of the best pagan and Christian authors, Leander prepared the way for the fruitful labors of his brother, St. Isidore, who paid this tribute to him.

It was Leander who educated and trained his brother, and “though not a creative genius,” Isidore “was a man of great learning and broad intellectual interests with great enthusiasm for the wisdom of the past” (*A History* 85). Clearly, such were the tools necessary for his impressive work, the *Etymologiae*.

29 The English translation of the *Epistolae* is taken from Stephen A. Barney et al. Further, it should be noted that, according to the translators, these letters of correspondence, though not all of them, precede the *Etymologiae* in the early manuscripts. I have utilized the G. B. Ford Jr. translation, *The Letters of St. Isidore of Seville* (*Letters*), second ed. (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1970) only where Stephen A. Barney et al. has not supplied the letters in question.