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Speaking and writing:
diamesic variation in Germanic magic

Germanic charm incantations are written texts which preserve the oral nature of magic as the recitation, singing or reading of texts represent a kind of oral performance. However, bracteates, runic inscriptions, poetical texts, charms preserved in manuscripts, as well as amulets, provide evidence that writing, together with whispering and silence, strongly contributed to the efficacy of the charms in the Germanic tradition. In fact, if Old English *gealdor*, *cweþan* and Old High German *sprechan*, which occur in Germanic charm incantations, refer to the power of the spoken word, Old Icelandic *rísta* (*rúnar*), Old English *wrītan*, *gemearcan* and Old High German *scriban*, reveal that writing was part of the diamesic variation in the performance of charms. By focusing on the occurrences of the words belonging to the semantic area of *writing* in Germanic magical texts, this paper investigates the specific role of writing as a medium meant to strengthen the magical power of words and transform the handling of a marked/signed object into the handling of a magic object.

[magic; charms; linguistic variation; runes; Germanic languages]

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The recitation, singing or reading of texts, such as incantations, represent a kind of oral performance[1], although they have been written down in medieval manuscripts.

In the last decades, several scholars have investigated the oral origins of Medieval poetry and literature, considering writing as a witness of orality. Medieval manuscripts preserve many texts that are the written representation of an oral performance. This makes the situation of texts/utterances in the European Middle Ages ambiguous because of the interactions between orality and literacy which peak in the Middle Ages[2].

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[1] Arnovick 2006: 9-10.
[2] Ong 1984: 11. O'Brien O'Keeffe states that writing can be considered a technology which makes language visible. Moreover, committing spoken words to writing involves a change in the evaluation of any communicative act because writing introduces space and duration in communication. So, while speaking is a temporal act which depends on the presence of the audience before a speaker (the performer), writing is long-lasting and does not depend on the speaker or the presence of a writer. In addition, the arrangement of a text on a page becomes a crucial con-

The anthropological investigation on oral poetry proposed by Milman Parry and refined by Albert B. Lord, which is known as the Oral-Formulaic Theory, provided a solid basis to define orality and oral literature[3]. Metrical formulae, type-scenes, folkloric structure, thematic context, and aesthetic imagery, among other symptomatically oral features have been discovered in medieval texts, and this has led to isolate the distinctly oral, versus written, manifestations of oral features in medieval texts[4]. However, orality and writing are so deeply interwoven (as there may be many levels of oral influence in written texts[5]), that an investigation on the literature of the medieval period should be pursued along the twin axes of orality and literacy[6].

In particular, Germanic culture was characterised by 'primary orality' for long, since the ancient Germanic peoples initially did not have any contact with writing. Later on, the Germanic peoples started to write their 'memories' and 'oral' texts transforming their culture into a 'literate culture', which could be identified as a 'secondary orality culture', because of the use of writing to transmit oral traditions[7].

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stituent of its meaning, with space and visual features normally unavailable for both performer and audience of a speech act (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990: ix, 4-6).

[3] Parry 1970. Following Parry's previous investigations on Homeric Verse, Lord analysed performances of South Slavic Oral epic in an effort to understand the composition of Homer's works. He stated that for the oral poet singing, performing and composing are facets of the same act, and he identified the structural units of oral poetry as the 'formula' (a group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express an essential idea), the 'theme' (groups of ideas used in telling a tale), and the 'song', that is narrative acts (Lord 1960: 13, 31, 61, 100). However, recent research on Homeric oral poetry has highlighted that a rigid identification and acceptance of *formulae* would prevent scholars from seeing the distinction between the epic tradition as a whole and the individual poet. In fact, Homeric texts display both formulaic and non-formulaic expressions, which confirms that oral-conceived texts allowed the poet to give his own contribution to poetic diction still within the solid frame of epic traditions (Finkelberg 2012: 73, 77-78, 82).

[4] Jensen's investigation on oral epic in India and Egypt has proved that there is no clear distinction between oral and written texts, as suggested by Parry and Lord. Oral traditions exist in communities in which writing also exists and books are accessible to poets/singers who do not use them purposely. This implies the existence of transitional texts which poets could or could not find helpful (Jensen 2008: 43, 49-51). Bäuml remarked that the name 'Oral-Formulaic theory' merges two concepts, i.e. 'orality' and *formulae*, pointing to an exclusive relationship between orality and formulaic expressions. However, *formulae* do not necessarily characterise only oral compositions as written texts could rely on *formulae* as well, depending on genre, function of the text and period of composition (Bäuml 1984: 31-33, 43-45).

[5] Arnovick 2006: 11-12.

[6] Amodio 1994: 4. Amodio distinguishes between oral delivery and oral poetics, with the latter defined as "largely nonperformative" (Amodio 2004: 98).

[7] According to Ong's definition, 'primary orality' is the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print. This orality is 'primary' in contrast to the 'secondary orality'

Namely, writing spread in the Germanic world through four stages:

1. the first stage is represented by the very first contact the Germanic tribes had with ancient Rome. The imperial burocracy, trade, letters, military instructions/commands offered Germanic soldiers some examples of writing (in Latin) which are interpreted as the premise for the inscriptions devoted to the *Matronae* or *Deae matres*[8], dated to the first-fifth centuries CE, by Germanic soldiers working for the Roman army in the area corresponding to modern Germany;
2. the first runic inscriptions, dating back to the second century CE[9];
3. Christianisation: the Visigoths, first (fourth century CE), and then the Ostrogoths[10], the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, the Scandinavians got acquainted with writing through the Christian religion[11];
4. the spread of the Catholic Christianity, which made Latin the language of culture across Western Europe, imposing the Latin alphabet as the main medium to write texts in any language (Latin and the vernaculars)[12].

Those stages should not be considered as discrete moments sharply isolating oral from written tradition. Primary oral culture and primary literate culture should not be considered two opposite *termini* of a *continuum* of culture/communication with 'primary' orality and 'pure' literacy at the two opposite ends of that *continuum*[13]. Cultural experience at any point in time implies a mixing of degrees of orality and literacy[14].

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of present-day high technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices which depend on writing and print for their existence and functioning (Ong 2012³: 6-11). Referred to the Middle Ages, 'secondary orality' refers to 'orality' copied in or transferred to manuscripts.

[8] On the *Matronae* in Rhineland, see Much 1891: 321-323 and Scardigli 1989.

[9] Düwel 2008: 23-24.

[10] On the impact of Latin on the Gothic tradition, see Francovich Onesti 2011: 205-207 (on the alphabet).

[11] On the Christianisation of Early Medieval England, see Stenton 2004: 96-129; on the spread of Christianity among the Franks, see Sonderegger 2003: 37-42; on the spread of Christianity in Scandinavia, see Cormack 2005: 28-30.

[12] On the use of Latin across Europe in the Middle Ages and on the material for writing, see Richter 2016: 103-113.

[13] In an anthropological perspective, writing has been considered a cultural invention marking a new stage in the history of language. On the steps that led to writing as an evolutionary path which ends with writing, and writing using alphabets as the perfect representation of speaking, see Cardona 1981: 20-21, 33-35.

[14] Zumthor 1990: 21.

It is generally accepted that at some point in their lives all peoples are 'oral' peoples, and the evidence of early medieval European cultures shows the 'oral' and the 'literate' affecting and forming or deforming one another.

In the last decades, a number of studies have explored the varieties of orality and of literacy specific to medieval societies. Challenging the "hypothesis on the mutually exclusive states of orality and literacy, such studies have shown the extent to which vocality (*Vokalität*, with the sense of vocalizing when writing or reading aloud to an audience) and 'writtenness' (*Schriftlichkeit*, usefully nuancing 'literacy' in referring to the commitment of texts to writing) interact in complex ways"[15].

In sociolinguistics, languages are considered living beings and utterances are analysed in relation to the 'variables' (time, space, situation, social stratum, means of communication) which assign meaning and function to them. Therefore, the variability of languages is usually described by scholars according to the above-mentioned variables by identifying five dimensions of linguistic variation:

1. diachronical variation, which refers to the variation of a language through time;
2. diatopic variation, which refers to linguistic variation on a geographical level;
3. diastratic variation, which is the variation of a language according to the social class or the group the speaker/user belongs to[16];
4. diaphasic variation, which refers to the stylistic variation of a language according to situations and functions;
5. diamesic variation, which is the variation of a language depending on the medium of communication, whether spoken or written[17].

[15] O'Brien O'Keeffe 2016: 121. Chinca and Young maintain that medieval literacy and orality should not be considered as two unrelated modes of communication, but rather as two interplaying modes (Chinca/Young 2005: 1). A further intermediate mode of communication, apart from reading and listening, should be considered: aurality (Coleman 1996: 1-33, in particular 27-27) or *Vokalität*, as this mode is called by Schäfer (1992: 5-20).

[16] The Norvegian linguist Leiv Flydal analysed languages as historical objects, i.e. ways of communicating by language bound to the coordinates of a particular speech community, and called the set of diachronic, diastratic and diatopic variations/dimensions (diastratic and diatopic, with the diachronical variation accepted as introduced by de Saussure) 'the architecture of language' (see Flydal 1951). In 1981 Eugenio Coseriu added the diaphasic variation to Flydal's list (see Coseriu 1981). As to the distinction between 'diachronic and synchronic', see de Saussure 2005: 98-114, 123-185.

[17] The fourth synchronic variation, i.e. diamesic, was first introduced in Italian linguistics by Alberto Mioni (see Mioni 1983).

Diamesic variation could be placed beyond the level of diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic variation, since it represents a different modality of communication[18]. However, there is such a wide range of differences between written and spoken language, including pragmatics and textuality, lexicon and morphosyntax, that it is reasonable to postulate an independent variation[19].

This will prove useful in the following pages dealing with spoken and written magic 'acts'.

Although scholars agree that 'writing' appeared after speech in the history of mankind (as far as we know), writing has not always been exclusively dependent on orality, that is it has not always been a 'tool' to report oral/spoken words[20].

Finding a definition for 'writing' which does not depend on 'speaking' is rather difficult, since our understanding and representation of language is strongly linked to the sounds of languages: letters (in either alphabetical or syllabic writing) render spoken words. Moreover, the history of writing is often seen in a philogenetic perspective in which a route towards an increasing perfection of writing is assumed, with alphabetic writing being the final and most perfect stage[21].

In the light of these observations that point out how difficult it is to disconnect writing from speaking, Cardona made an attempt to find a speaking-unbound definition of writing: writing is the set of operations and material products related to production and use of graphic systems[22]. In a sociolinguistic perspective, the creation of a written text is a linguistic act that can be performed in different institutional domains of writing that Cardona recognized as: a) magic-sacred, b) economic, c) educational and literary, d) political and juridical. The event of writing has only one sender-participant and one or many addressees. In certain cases, the addressee might be the writer himself[23].

As far as Germanic charm incantations (runic, Old English and Old High German charms) are concerned, the evidence from medieval literary sources

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[18] Berruto 1987: 21-22; Berruto/Cerruti 2011: 278-285.
[19] Berruto 2010: 235.
[20] On the birth of writing and its value as a means of communication, see Fischer 2001: 8.
[21] As stated by Franklin, "[w]riting and non-writing, the sphere of the written and the sphere of the spoken ('literacy' and 'orality') have often been presented as polar opposites, or – in the technocentric scheme – as ideally distinct stages in sociocultural evolution. This is misleading. The written mode and the spoken mode are neither discrete stages on an evolutionary journey nor entirely interchangeable options at any given time. The notion of a distinct 'orality' is properly tenable only with regard to societies where writing is wholly unknown. Otherwise the culture of the written word and the culture of the spoken word overlap, interact, modify and modulate each other" (Franklin 2002: 8).
[22] Cardona 1981: 32.
[23] *Ivi*: 101.

indicates that much Germanic magic was expressed, as in classical tradition, by stylised, or actually sung language. A magical act is literally called a song or the like among many of the early European peoples. Old Icelandic (OI) *gala*, Old English (OE) *galan*, Old High German (OHG) *galan*, *bigalan* 'enchant'[24]; OI *galdr*, OE *gealdor*, OHG *galstar* 'charm, something sung'; OHG *galstâri* 'magician' are all etymologically connected with Germanic (Gm.) **galdra-*,**galdraz*[25] 'charming chant, enchantment' < Indo-European (IE.) **ghel-*[26] 'call, cry, sing, enchant'. Furthermore, OE *galdor* shares the same semantic field as Latin *carmen* 'song, charm' and *incantantio* (probably from Latin *cano*[27] 'sing'), Greek *epôdê*[28] 'ode' and 'charm', Old Irish *bricht*[29] (which is also a type of poem)[30] 'charm'. These words describe also the type of magic that was expressed in runic inscriptions[31].

Moreover, magic texts witness a change in the power of spoken words depending on the 'primitive' vs 'non-primitive' use of spoken words[32], which results in different magic genres. In a pragmatic perspective, magic texts using words as

[24] For Old Icelandic, Old English and Old High German words see Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, Bosworth/Toller 1998 and Schützeichel 2012 respectively: s.v.

[25] For Germanic roots and words, see Köbler 2014: s.v.

[26] For Indo-European roots and words, see Pokorny 1959: s.v.

[27] For Latin words, see Glare 1982: s.v.

[28] For Greek words, see Montanari 2015: s.v.

[29] eDIL 2019: s.v.

[30] Saibene 1985: 50; Helm 1937-53: 122.

[31] Norse sources differentiate between two main forms of magic, *galdr* and *seiðr*, with the latter originally meaning 'binding' and often referred to in Old Icelandic literature as womanly and evil. Mitchell pointed out that the number of magical actors in surviving saga literature is roughly equal as regards gender (Mitchell 2019: 137, on the Nordic inventory of words for magical acts and actors, see 142), although in the pre-Christian Nordic world women were the original most powerful magicians, whereas men gained access to magic only later and never attained parity with women, either in numbers or power (Jochens 2016: 130-131). However, it is far from clear that *galdr* was always used for good or that *seiðr* was always employed maliciously. A parallel to the Norse tradition of *seiðr* is known only from marginal English and German sources, and the later Scandinavian spell books are described only as containing *galdrar*. Although *seiðr* is described at length in Old Norse literature, it had never developed into a tradition amenable to being written down (MacLeod/Mees 2006: 10).

[32] The power of magic words relied on the primitive belief that natural magic forces existed and that such forces gave words the power to affect the world because of their immediate connection with the objects they represented. Old magic inscriptions on amulets addressed reality directly (primitive use of language), whereas later inscriptions (dated to the fifth and sixth century CE) need to invoke gods or the Christian God to be effective (Helm 1953: II, 117-153). Later charms, with the so-called *historiola* and a magic command, offer examples of the magic use of words depending on previous magical experiences rather than on the inner magic power of words, and this reveals a change towards the non-primitive use of words (Dolfini 1967: 643-660; Ramat 1976: 60-64; Saibene 1985: 23-27; Buzzoni 1996: 21-40, Cianci 2004: 46-51).

'reality' and relying on 'semiotic fallacy'[33] can be identified as *formulae* (charms, like *Wið ymbe* and *Wið wennum*, and iconograms); oral texts using words as acts (proper speech acts) are classified as 'remedies', since they feature a series of instructions to achieve the desired result without modifying the real world per se[34].

Magic-related texts make clear that practitioners relied on the creative and healing power of spoken words. The creative power of the 'spoken word' is witnessed by several poetic texts. Among Old English charms it is worth mentioning two lines of the *Metrical Charm* 11 *A Journey Charm*, where the wish to obtain victory and the naming of victory itself create victory in 'words' and in 'acts':

> Sige*gealdor* ic begale,   sigewyrd ic me wege
> *Word*sige and *worc*sige[35].

The sixth stanza of the *Vǫlospá*, the poem opening the *Poetic Edda*, offers a further example of 'naming' as 'creation':

> Þá gengo regin ǫll   á rǫcstóla
> ginnheilog goð,   oc um þat gættuz:
> nótt oc niðiom   *nǫfn* um *gáfo*,
> morgin *héto*   ok miðian dag,
> undorn oc aptan,   árom at telia[36].

'Night' and 'new moon' become real thanks to the action of *nafn gefa* 'give name' and *hēta* 'call, name' (OI *hēta*, OE *hātan*, OHG *heizzan* 'call, name, order' and 'to be called/named', and OI *kweþa*, OE *cweðan*, OHG *quedan* 'say'). Pronouncing words means creating and controlling reality.

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[33] The phrase 'semiotic fallacy' identifies the perfect match between a spoken word, sound or signifier, and its corresponding meaning or signified (Buzzoni 1996: 28, 34-39, 107. On *semiotic fallacy*, see also Nöth 1977: 70 and Nöth 1995: 190-191), and that match contradicts the arbitrary relationship between the two as postulated by semiotics (de Saussure 2005: 83-88).

[34] *Wið ymbe*, *For a Swarm of Bees* (Dobbie 1942: 125) and *Wið wennum*, *Against a wen* (Dobbie 1942: 128) are two examples of charms (*formulae*); *Wið heafodece*, *Against Headache* (Cockayne 1864-66: II, 20-21). For a genre classification of magic texts based on the participants in magical speech acts, see De Bonis 2021.

[35] Dobbie 1942: 127, ll. 6-7; henceforth, in quotations, italics highlights key-words. "A victory charm I sing, a victory rod I bear / Victory of words, victory of works" (when no bibliographical reference is provided, the translation is by G.D.B.).

[36] Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 2; "Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate, / the sacrosanct gods, and considered this: / to night and their children they gave names, / morning they named and midday, / afternoon and evening, to reckon up in years" (Larrington 2014: 4).

A less primitive use, and the healing power, of words can be seen, for instance, in the OHG *Pro Nessia* 'Against worms', where words do not have any magical power themselves, even though the practitioner directly addresses the disease to manipulate it by means of words. In fact, he employs words to command the worm to leave the body and gives instructions (imperatives), but his words 'are' not their correspondent 'signified', that is there is no immediate and perfect match between signifier and signified:

> Gang út, nesso, mid nigun nessiklinon,
> út fana themo margę an that ben, fan themo bene an that flesg,
> ut fan themo flesge an thia hud, ut fan thera hud an thesa strala.
> drohtin, uuerthe so[37]!

In addition to this, bracteates, runic inscriptions, poetical texts, Old English and Old High German charms preserved in manuscripts, as well as amulets, provide evidence that writing was a further medium which made charms effective in the Germanic tradition.

In fact, OI *rísta* (*rúnar*), OE *wrītan*, *gemearcan* and OHG *scrīban* 'carve, form letters, write', which also feature in Germanic magical texts, reveal that writing was part of the diamesic variation in the performance of charms.

When dealing with magical, ritual, and divinatory aspects, writing is related to the supernatural world. The whole history of writing shows how man has always believed that the world can be acted upon by the manipulation of symbols, and how man comes to feel a sacred terror of these very symbols and their power[38]. If a 'speech act' is a communicative activity linked to the intentions of the speaker and the achieved effect on a listener[39], writing is an act affecting an addressee who is a reader. Moreover, writing separates the speech from the speaker, the

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[37] Steinmeyer 1963: 374 (LXVII); "Go out, worm, with nine small worms, / out of the bone marrow into the bone, from the bone into the flesh, from the flesh into the skin, from the skin into the hoof. / God, let it be so!". On *Pro Nessia*, see also Saibene 1985: 31-38.

[38] Writing and literacy are the tangible sign of the word of God, as writing makes god's words visible in the Bible, the Koran; in China any written text could be sacred just because written (Cardona 1981:154-155).

[39] 'Speech act' is a term derived from the work of the philosopher Austin and now widely used in linguistics, to refer to a theory which analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication. It is not an 'act of speech' (in the sense of *parole*), but a communicative activity (a locutionary act), defined with reference to the intentions of speakers while speaking (the illocutionary force of their utterances) and the effects they achieve on listeners (the perlocutionary effect of their utterances), see Austin 1962: 109-131 and Crystal 2008: s.v. *speech act*.

message from the messenger, the known from the knower. It resituates the word in time and space[40].

As for the 'spoken words', also for the 'written word' it is possible to identify a 'primitive' use of written words against an 'ordinary' use of written words.

In the Germanic world as in other Indo-European and non-Indo-European cultures, the invention of writing is attributed to gods[41], as it can be inferred from some runic inscriptions.

The inscription on the stone found at Noleby Vg 63 (Sweden, sixth-seventh century, side A) reads

> runo fahi *ragina*ku(n)do toj-a[42];

the stone found at Sparlösa Vg 119 (Sweden, eighth century) reads

> "rūnaR … rægi[n]kundu"[43].

Raginakundo and *rægin-* (< Gm. **ragina-* 'god', OI *regin*, *rǫgn*, OE *regn* 'gods', and Gm. **kunþo* 'generated, born, descendant', OI *kundr*, Got. *-kunds*[44], OE. *-cund*, adjective termination denoting origin, OHG **kund* 'born') point to the divine origin of runes, as stated also in the Norse poetic tradition, for example in the *Hávamál*, stanza 80:

> Þat er þá reynt, er þú at rúnom spyrr,
> inom reginkunnom,
> þeim er gorðo ginregin
> oc fáði fimbulþulr,
> þá hefir hann bazt, ef hann þegir[45].

As to runes, in general, they retain a double meaning (some ambivalence), since the original meaning of the word 'rune' may have been 'hushed/whispered message'[46] or 'secret, whisper, wisdom and writing'[47], the last as written characters

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[40] Franklin 2002: 5.

[41] For the ancient Greeks, writing was invented by Hermes, for the Babylonians by Nabû, for the Egyptians by Thoth (Cardona 1981: 154).

[42] "[I] paint the suitable rune derived from the gods" (Birkett 2017: 154).

[43] "Runes of the gods made known" (MacLeod/Mees 2006: 181).

[44] For Gothic, see Streitberg 1910: s.v.

[45] Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 28; "That is now proved, what you asked of the runes, / of divine origin / which the great gods made / and the mighty sage coloured; / then it is best for him if he stays silent" (Larrington 2014: 23).

[46] See Antonsen 1980.

[47] Battaglia 2013: 217; on the etymology of OI *rún*, see de Vries 2000: s.v. *rún*.

conveying meaning without making a sound. Recent studies tend to refuse the meaning of OI *rún* 'secret, whisper' and highlight the meaning 'letter'[48]. The 'runic system'[49] did not have any definite magic value but in sporadic references to pagan gods in some of the oldest inscriptions (seventh-eighth centuries). Runes may not have been magic themselves, but they may have been used in magic, to compose magic words[50]. When referred to gods or when rendering 'magic' words on amulets (bracteates) or stones, runes were used 'primitively' evoking a signified concept (signifier = signified), as if the word written in runes were itself the signified concept and so providing an example of fallacy of semiotics in writing.

'Magic' words belonging to the Germanic tradition occur in runic inscriptions, later used in poems as 'signs' to be recognised or to 'write', 'carve' in order to modify reality. Among these words, Klaus Düwel mentions the 'charm word' (*Formelwort*) *alu*, word and rune which is common in inscriptions, whose meaning is not clear, but scholars agree in assigning it a magic value[51]. Gm. *aluþ 'beer' must originally have had the approximate meaning 'that which induces the ecstatic state', and *alu* would then have indicated the ecstatic state itself. On a cultstone (like the Elgersem Stone, 5th century) or other objects, *alu* would indicate that the object had been consecrated, perhaps by being sprinkled with beer, as suggested by Høst Heyerdahl[52] . Therefore, the person sprayed with beer or wearing an object marked with the word *alu* would gain protection against bad acts. There seems to be no doubt that *alu* represents a cult-word[53]. For instance, the Bracteate G 205, discovered in Djupbrunns (Djupbrunns-C), Hogrän, Sweden, dating from around 400 CE (now preserved at the Swedish History Museum, Stockholm), reads simply *Alu*: the written word *alu* itself seems to guarantee protection for the owner of the object against negative powers[54].

The power of *alu* is witnessed also in poetry, for example in two stanzas of the *Sigrdrífumál*:

> Stanza 7
> *Qlrúnar* scaltu kunna, ef þú vill, annars qvæn

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[48] Battaglia 2013: 203-204.
[49] Derolez 1981: 19.
[50] Page 1999: 106.
[51] Düwel 2008: 13-14, 53.
[52] Høst Heyerdahl 1980: 45. Polomé compares *alu* with Greek *'alýein* 'to be beside oneself, out of one's mind' and Hittite *alwanzatar-* 'magic'. Later, this word meant 'fury, wrath, ecstasy, elation', and eventually 'magic, charm, incantation performed through ecstasy' (see Polomé 1996).
[53] Antonsen 2002: 196-200.
[54] On the meaning of Gm. *alu 'protection'/'beer' and previously suggested interpretations, see Conant 1973: 467-468, 472-473.

vélit þic í trygð, ef þú trúir;
á horni scal þær rísta ok á handar baki
ok merkia á nagli Nauð[55].

Stanza 19
Þat ero bókrúnar, þat ero biargrúnar.
ok allar *ǫlrúnar*,
ok mætar meginrúnar,
hveim er þær kná óviltar ok óspiltar
sér at heillom hafa –
nióttu, ef þú namt,
unz riúfaz regin![56]

Alu performs a magic function, although it remains unspoken.

A further charm word (*Formelwort*) is *laukaR* 'leek, herb of life'[57], which occurs on the scraper from Fløksand (Meland, Hordaland, south-west Norway, today at the Bergen Museum): *linalaukaR*, that is 'linen (and) leek' (onion or garlic)[58]. Both linen and leek were used for preserving goods from decay. Probably the inscription is a sort of charm indicating 'fertility and prosperity' on the basis of the meaning of *laukaR*. The name usually assigned to the 'l-rune' is Gm. **laguz* 'lake, water', but it is also witnessed and recorded as Gm. **laukaz* 'leek, prosperity'[59].

The object dates back to 350 ca. and the inscription seems to work on its own. Again, the Norse tradition provides further evidence of the magical value of words.

This combination of words (*lina-laukar*) is also known from a much later Norse story, *Volsi's Tale* (*Vǫlsa Þáttr*, in *Flateyjarbók*[60]). This early-fourteenth-century text recounts how a farmer's wife in northern Norway prepared a fetish for a heathen fertility ritual: a horse's phallus was kept preserved with the help of linen and leek. The farmer's wife sang a song over the object before handing it to her family, who passed the phallus round from one to another around the meal

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[55] Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 187; "Ale-runes must you know if you do not want another's wife / to beguile your trust, if you trust her; / on a horn they should be cut and on the back of the hand, / and mark your nail with 'Nauð'" (Larrington 2014: 163).
[56] Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 189; "Those are book-runes, those are helping-runes, / and all the ale-runes, / and precious runes of power, / for those who can, without confusing them, without destroying them, / possess them for good fortune; / use them, if you get them, / until the gods are torn asunder!" (Larrington 2014: 165).
[57] Heizmann 1992: 381f.
[58] Looijenga 2003: 354.
[59] Krause 1971: 175. For the names of runes, see also MacLeod/Mees 2006: 14.
[60] Vigfusson/Unger 1860-1868: II, 1862, 333.

table (the ritual had to be performed each evening in autumn), and each person who received it was required to say a strophe over it, one of which was:

> Aukinn ertu, Volsi, ok upp tekinn,
> líni goeddr, en laukum studdr[61].

Volsi is Norse slang for a penis, and horses' penises/phalluses, linen and leeks were obviously associated with fertility magic[62]. But it is clear from the tale that the purpose of the fetish was not to encourage sexual fertility in each of the diners who held it and spoke a charm over it. It conveyed a more general sense of fertility, instead – that associated with autumn, the time of harvests and the slaughtering of animals for meat.

The comparison between the Vǫlsi strophe and the Fløksand inscription could provide an example of diamesic variation: the scraper carries the power of the two charm words in their written form (though it is possible that someone pronounced them), while the account from the *Flateyjarbók* offers a poetic use of the words, since they are connected to each other by means of alliteration, a figure of speech that works only if words are spoken.

The inscription on the Stentoften stone (650 ca., now in the church of Sölveborg, Blecklinge, Sweden) offers an example of the use of runes with their double value of written representation of sounds (i.e. 'letters') and concepts. The text can be divided in two sections: a dedication text and a curse. The first three lines of the inscription display the following three series of transliterated runes:

I. niuhᴧborumR; II. niuhagestumR; III. hᴧþuwolᴧfRgᴧfj[63].

ᚻᛁᚢᚻᛁᛒᛟᚱᚢᛗᛦ
ᚻᛁᚢᚻᚨᚷᛖᛋᛏᚢᛗᛦ
ᚺᛁᚦᚢᚱᛟᛚᚨᚠᚨᚷᛁᚠᛊ
ᚺᛁᚱᛁᛈᛟᚱᛁᚠᛁᛚᛖᛇᛁᚢᚻᛁᛗ
ᚺᛁᛗᛗᚨᚱᚾᛟᛉᛟᚠᛗᛖᛁᚻᛗᛦᛁᚺᛗᛗᛗᚱᛁᛉᛁᛁᛟᚱᛟᛁᛟᛉ
ᚺᛗᚱᛁᛗᛁᛚᛊᛁᚨᛁᚱᛁᚷᛖᚢᛈᛗᛚᛁᛗᛟᛗᛊᛁᚦᛁᛏᛒᛁᚱᛁᚢᛏᛁᚦ

Depending on different word separation, according to Düwel, the first two se-ries could be read in four different ways[64]:

1. niu hA-borumR niu ha-gestumR
2. niu HA-borumR niu Ha-gestumR
3. niuhA borumR niuha gestumR
4. ni uhA borumR ni uha gestumR

Only the third line can be easily read and interpreted as "Hathuwolf gave *j*", where the rune j = Gm. *jēran (rune for *jāra* 'beautiful year') expresses the con-cept of 'good/fruitful year' rather than the sound [j][65], therefore "Hathuwolf gave a good year". This makes clear that the inscription of the *j*-rune does not necessarily mirror the sounds of the phrase 'good year', but the idea, the 'good year' granted by Hathuwolf, skipping any vocalisation.

The second part of the inscription possibly (the inscription is damaged) transmits a blessing and a curse[66]:

Hariwolfaʀ magiusnu (?) hlē.
H(æ)ideʀ rūnō (ru)no felheka hedera, ginnorūnōʀ
Hermalās (ūti) æʀ ærgiu; wēladūds sā þat briutiþ.

The *Runenmeister*'s writing performance made the inscription powerful by means of *rūnō (ru)no* and it could work as a curse, should it be manipulated by anyone. This means that the power of the inscription derives from the operative effect of the text, and lies in its written form[67].

Moving to the manuscript tradition of charms, most of them show verbal evi-dence of their oral origin. They are introduced as 'acts of saying' by means of verbs like OE *cweðan, hetan, singan*, OHG *quedan, heizzan, singan* 'say, call/order, sing'. Moreover, the analysis of the position of charms in manuscripts (either recorded on the margins or in the main text in manuscripts – as widely discussed

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[64] Düwel 2008: 21-22; 1. "To the nine high sons, to the nine high guests"; 2. "To the nine Oðin's sons, to the nine guests of Oðin's guests"; 3. "To the new dwellers/farmers, to the new guests" (this is the interpretation adopted by MacLeod/Mees 2006: 112); 4. "Not Uha to the sons, not Uha to the guests, but" (translation based on Düwel's). See MacLeod/Mees 2006: 112.
[65] Düwel 2008: 8.
[66] "Hariwolf protection to (your) descendants / A run of bright runes I commit here: mighty runes. / Protectionless (because of their) perversion; an insidious death to him who breaks this" (MacLeod/Mees 2006: 112, runic text and translation).
[67] On the performative, communicative and operative effect of runes, see Flowers 2006: 65, 72-88.

by Lea Olsan and Cianci[68]) confirms that charms were known/remembered by heart first, and then transferred to manuscript.

However, a number of manuscripts transmit magic texts that ask/command that their addressees 'write' something somewhere in order to achieve the desired results. For instance, in *Wiþ Dweorh*, *Wiþ Wyrme*, *Wiþ Ælfsogoþan* and in *Wiþ Ylfa Gescotum*, writing is an active 'ingredient' of the magic act. In fact, in these charms the expert/magician orders the performer to 'write/mark' something on someone/something in order to heal him/her/it or protect/free from evil powers:

> Wiþ Dweorh, Man sceal niman VII lytic oflætan, swylce man mid ofrað, and *writan* þa naman on ælcre oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Johannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. […][69].

> Wiþ Wyrme, Wið ðon þe mon oððe nȳten wyrm gedrince, gyf hyt sȳ wǣpnedcynnes, sing ðis lēoð in þæt swīðre ēare þe hēr æfter *awriten* is; […][70].

> Wiþ Ælfsogoþan, *Writ* þis *gewrit*: Scriptum est, rex regum […] Wǣt þæt *gewrit* on þām drence and *writ* crucem mid him on ælcum lime, and cweð […][71].

> Wiþ Ylfa Gescotum, […] *Writ* þonne þām horse on þām hēafde foran crīstes mǣl, þæt hit blēde; *writ* þonne on þām hricge cristes mǣl, and on leoþa gehwilcum þe þū ætfēolan mǣe. Nim þonne þæt winestre ēare, þurhsting swigende. […][72]

This pattern is used also in commands requesting actions other than 'text writing on' or 'marking' objects as if the expert devolves his power to the performer. In the same communicative context it is possible to notice how different actions are requested: 'sing', 'say', 'go in silence' and 'write'. This means that there is a variation in the means to be used in 'magic'.

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[68] Among Olsan's contributions, see Olsan 1990 and 2013; Cianci 2004: 39-40 and the pages devoted to each text.

[69] Dobbie 1942: 121. "Against a dwarf, one must take seven little wafers, such as are used in worship, and *write* these names on each wafer: Maximianus, Malchus, Johannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion" (Storms 1948: 167).

[70] "For a worm, in case a person or a beast drink up a worm, if it be of the male sex, sing the spell, which *is* hereinafter *written*, in the [victim's] right ear […]" (Grendon 1908: 168-169).

[71] "For elf hiccup, [...] *Write* this *writing*: Scriptum est, rex regum et dominus […] Moisten the *writing* in the drink and *mark* a cross with it on every limb, and say […]" (*ibidem*: 186-189).

[72] "Against Elf-Shot, […] Then *write* a cross on the horse's forehead until it bleed; next *mark* a cross on [the animal's] back and on each of its limbs that you can hold on to. Then grasp the left ear, pierce it in silence" (Grendon 1908: 208-209).

This diamesic variation in charms could be interpreted as the result of a diachronic variation, as it could be assumed that 'writing' entered the realm of 'magic' remedies after the Germanic peoples had acquired the habit of writing with the Latin alphabet. On the other hand, runic evidence proves that diamesic variation was already active in ancient times because rune-related texts reveal a shift from 'naming, saying' to 'writing, colouring, carving', as exemplified in the stanzas 15 and 16 of the *Sigrdrífumál*, where there is a list of objects to be engraved:

Stanza 15
Á scildi qvað *ristnar*, þeim er stendr fyr scínanda goði,
á eyra Árvacrs oc á Alsvinnz hófi,
á því hvéli, er snýz undir reið Rungnis,
á Sleipnis tǫnnom oc á sleða fiotrom,

Stanza 16
á biarnar hrammi oc á Braga tungo,
á úlfs klóm oc á arnar nefi,
á blóðgom vængiom oc á brúar sporði,
á lausnar lófa oc á lícnar spori[73],

In a pragmatic perspective, diamesic variation is linked to a pragmatic change, that is a change in the way human beings interact with the world:

- the 'magic' word addresses the reality the speaker wants to change directly;
- the written 'magic' word addresses the performer of a 'magic' act creating a time lapse between the start time of the magic act and its efficacy.

This delay in efficacy makes the magic utterance long-lasting, permanently active as amulets and rune stones show.

A written locution may have both an illocutive and a perlocutive value, since it represents a communicative activity (providing the reader/addressee with some information) and a perlocutive act because by means of 'written' imperatives, as 'spoken' imperative words do, it aims at having an effect on or a reaction from the addressee.

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[73] Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 188-189; Stanza 15: "'On a shield', he said, 'they should be cut, the one which stands before the shining god, / on Arvak's ear and Alsvinn's hoof, / on that wheel which turns under [H]rungnir's chariot, / on Sleipnir's teeth and on the sledges' strap-bands"; Stanza 16: "on the bear's paw and on Bragi's tongue, / on the wolf's claw, and the eagle's beak, / on bloody wings and at the end of the bridge, / on hands which deliver and on the trail of a helpful man" (Larrington 2014: 165).

In conclusion, speaking and writing, as means of communication, do not exclude each other. Indeed, they coexist in the Germanic magic tradition as responsible of the diamesic variation in magic.

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