2 The Bible in North American Folklore[1]

Brian Malley

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a surge of interest in understanding the roles scriptures play in the lives of individuals and institutions. This interest really is new, for, although there were repeated attempts by individual scholars in the twentieth century to develop a comparative theory of scriptures, only recently has there been a sustained effort to figure out what is going on, socially and psychologically, in scriptural traditions. Not surprisingly, empirical inquiry has shown that many common assumptions about the social use of scriptures are partial truths, systematically distorted by the ideological function they serve in scripturalist traditions (Levering 1989). In earlier work (Malley 2004), I have shown how, from the very definition of "the Bible" to the demarcation of scriptural authority, evangelical Christians in the United States recruit cognitive predispositions, institutionally distributed and framed by largely tacit conventions, to find in the Bible an inexhaustible fount of meaning. Eva Keller (2005) has described the epistemological function of Bible study and how it figures in the intellectual life of Malagasy Christians. James Bielo (2009b) has examined the social interactions involved in Bible study and shown why this form of social interaction is such an important dimension of scripturalist Christianity. Strikingly similar dynamics have shown up in a variety of contexts, suggesting that it makes sense to speak of a global Biblicist tradition (Bielo 2009a), within which differences can be especially revealing (Engelke 2007).

Certainly one of the basic assumptions of the Biblicist tradition is that Bibles are text artifacts (Silverstein & Urban 1996) for reading and understanding. But that has seldom, if ever, been the only way that Bibles have been used. As the traditions here reported will bear out, for many people the Bible was not only meaningful but also efficacious. The notion of an efficacious text artifact is somewhat befuddling to those of us, especially scholar types, who are almost compulsively literate. Perhaps for this reason, histories of the Bible have tended to be histories of its authorship, interpretation, and translation and have seldom included amuletic and divinatory uses. Yet ethnographic research has shown that the artifactual properties of

Bibles play an important role in the way that Christian communities relate to this text, even providing a de facto definition for what constitutes a Bible (Malley 2004: chapter 2). And it is clear, from the way Bibles are decorated and treated, that the artifactual character of the Bible is connected with its perceived sacredness (Ackroyd, Evans, Lampe, & Greenslade 1963–1970; De Hamel 2001; Gutjahr 1999).

I have undertaken here to collect as many magical and mantic uses of the Bible as possible from English-language North American folklore. The purpose of this collection was twofold. First, there is documentary value in cataloguing the variety of different magical and divinatory uses of the Bible in North America for ease of reference. The materials gathered here have not been collected before, save as tiny fragments of much larger folklore collections, yet many more varieties of Biblicist practice are included here than in any other collection. Second, it is hoped that the juxtaposition of these different traditions will shed some light on the organization of magical and divinatory behavior surrounding the Bible—that is, that this collection will show something about the way the Bible was understood among English speakers in North America.

In collecting reports I was enormously aided by the digitization of records carried out by Google™ in collaboration with the University of Michigan libraries, and by UCLA's Online Archive of American Folk Medicine (http://www.folkmed.ucla.edu/). In doing searches I quickly discovered that the most productive key words were *Bible*, *Lord's* (as in the Lord's Prayer), and *psalm*. In addition, I spent innumerable hours flipping manually through folklore collections that either were unindexed or whose indexes did not include the relevant terms. I tried to make this survey as comprehensive as possible, but despite my best efforts, there were some collections I was unable to consult, and doubtless I overlooked some reports even in works I did consult. Nonetheless, I eventually reached a point where further searching ceased to yield new artifactual uses, and this gives me some measure of confidence that the present survey is at least reasonably complete. The result is a companion piece to my earlier article, "The Bible in British folklore" (2006), to which reference will occasionally be made. Between the two I believe I have canvassed most English-language folklore concerning the Bible.

LIMITATIONS

The reader should note some important limitations to the resulting catalogue. This collection does not represent any naturally occurring category of folklore. First, it does not represent any individual's understanding of Biblicist folklore: there is no reason to believe that any one person ever knew all of the charms and procedures reported here, and in fact, we seldom found reports on more than two or three from the same person.

Second, within the body of folklore, there was no folk distinction between traditions involving Bibles and those that did not. Biblicist traditions were thoroughly intermingled with other, non-Biblicist ones. For instance, it was said that one could avoid bad dreams at night by sleeping with a Bible under one's pillow (Puckett, Hand, Casetta, & Thiederman 1981, no. 4944)—or by drinking from the same bucket as a horse (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 4942). Often a Bible was just one of several alternative objects or substances that could be used for a procedure. For instance, when taking up residence in a new home, some traditions relate that bringing in a Bible among the first items will bring good luck (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17061)—but other traditions suggest salt for the same purpose (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17000), and still others recommend a Bible and salt (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17003).

Finally, there is no a priori reason to think that English-language folklore in North America is discontinuous from non-English folklore in the same area, and it is demonstrably continuous with English-language folklore outside North America. Despite these limitations, I think the present collection is a useful sample of the Biblicist lore socially available to English speakers in North America. The very limitations that keep this study from being a definitive treatment of any natural category make it an interesting sample of Biblicist lore more broadly, and this is fortuitous, for it is, in the end, Biblicist lore in general that is of primary interest.

The present study focuses on magical and divinatory uses of Bibles-as-artifacts, Bible-texts-as-artifacts, and Bible-texts-as-texts. All written texts are material objects, and both whole Bibles and particular Bible texts were deployed as artifacts in magical procedures. In addition, Bible texts were sometimes deployed orally, as verbal strings. In collecting these reports, I focused on traditions in which a Bible, as artifact or text, was considered efficacious. I did not include reports that merely relate some practice to the Bible, such as the following:

> Some backwoods Christians of the wilder Holy Roller cults—adherents of the so-called "new ground religion," "pokeweed gospel," or "lightnin'-bug churches"—do not believe in doctors and will not take any sort of medicine. Their preachers say that the Word is ag'in physicians, and quote James 5:14–15: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick."
>
> I have seen seven or eight backwoods preachers kneeling about a sick man's bed, shouting the gibberish they call "the unknown tongue." As soon as these fellows knew that I was present they stopped yelling, since they believe that the presence of an unbeliever breaks the charm. They claim some remarkable cures of inoperable cancer and the like. I know personally of cases where they have attempted to raise the dead; in one instance they "wooled the corpse around" for several hours, even pulling the body off the bed by their frenzied "laying on of hands."
>
> (Randolph 1947: 160)

Although referencing a scriptural passage, this practice did not use the text to heal or revive. Neither did I include beliefs that were simply attributed to the Bible, however curiously:

> Bread baked Friday comes out good. This belief is from Bible history; when Christ was being pursued by the Romans he sought refuge in a house where a woman was baking bread. She hid him, and her bread came out good, and after that her bread on Friday was always good.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 15517)

> It is good luck to break an earthen dish, because David in the Bible is said to have told a woman, after she had dropped a jug, that she was lucky she broke the jug and not herself.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 16529)

Although such traditions are significant for their demonstration that stories attributed to the Bible can spread independently of actual biblical texts, they do not deploy the taken-for-biblical story to achieve any end. Similarly, I have not included charms that merely invoke names or places from the Bible, which I reckoned as part of North American folk knowledge.

In sifting through the evidence, I occasionally ran into problematic ambiguities. Sometimes it was difficult to tell whether magic was involved, as in the following report:

> Preserve in the Bible one flower from a bouquet of a special occasion to preserve the happy memory.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 32149)

Was the Bible here thought to aid memory miraculously? Or was it simply a large book—probably the largest book most people owned—within which a flower might be effectively pressed? Or consider the following advice:

> If you become angry, say the first ten words of the Lord's Prayer.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 7268)

Was the Lord's Prayer a remedy for anger? Or a reminder of Christian values? Or a mechanism of delay—an equivalent to counting to ten? This report does not say and is without precise parallel, so we cannot know with certainty. In other cases, it is not clear what the rationale underlying a tradition might be, as in this Jewish tradition:

> If a person is very ill, give a Bible to the temple, and he will get well.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 7153)

Was this act of Torah gifting itself thought therapeutic? Or was a Torah merely one of many possible valuable objects that, given to the local temple,

might induce God to heal? We cannot tell from the report alone, and in this case no further context is provided.

This brings us to a final important limitation, having to do with the nature of the material. Here—as in the collections upon which this survey is based—prescriptions, anecdotes, and observations are freely mixed, though these are very different forms of rhetoric. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that we do not know why the traditions were presented as they were: seldom do we know anything at all about the contexts in which they were originally reported. In every case there are serious interpretive ambiguities. Despite this, convergence among different reports—especially when there are anecdotes and observations matching prescriptions—gives me some confidence that the basic facts are secure in most cases.

MAGICAL USES

The first group of practices we shall consider are all magical acts, in the sense that they employ Bibles or Bible texts to achieve some effect, and practitioners appear to have regarded the effect as an unmediated result of the procedures (on the category *magical acts*, see Barrett & Malley 2007). The practices here are sometimes called "Bible magic."

ARTIFACTUAL USES

The first set of magical uses involves the Bible as an artifact. Artifactual uses are uses of the Bible or biblical texts that turn on their artifactual properties—size, weight, location, etc.—rather than their textual properties. These properties, no less than the textual, inform Bibles' social use: it is as artifacts that Bibles are owned, gifted, and manipulated to heal or to harm. Bible artifacts were incorporated into actions as a means to an end (Lawson & McCauley 1990; McCauley & Lawson 2002): a person repelled witchcraft by carrying a Bible, or ensured good dreams by sleeping with a Bible under the mattress. People had in the physical book a powerful means of carrying out actions beyond their normal abilities.

By the time English-speaking peoples populated the New World, Bibles were customarily printed in single bound volumes. These artifacts formed a physical analogue for the Christian concept of "the Bible," such that now, not only could beliefs be predicated upon "the Bible," but—critically for our purposes—actions could also be performed on it.

Witch Trials

The most famous artifactual use of the Bible was in the trials of witches. The only such case I found was reported from Burlington in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on October 12, 1730:

> Saturday last at Mount-Holly, about 8 Miles from this Place, near 300 People were gathered together to see an Experiment or two tried on some Persons accused of Witchcraft. It seems the Accused had been charged with making their Neighbours Sheep dance in an uncommon Manner, and with causing Hogs to speak, and sing Psalms, etc., to the great Terror and Amazement of the King's good and peaceable Subjects in this Province, and the Accusers being very positive that if the Accused were weighed in Scales against a Bible, the Bible would prove too heavy for them; or that, if they were bound and put into the River, they would swim; the said Accused desirous to make their Innocence appear, voluntarily offered to undergo the said Trials, if 2 of the most violent of their Accusers would be tried with them. Accordingly the Time and Place was agreed on, and advertised about the Country; The Accusers were 1 Man and 1 Woman; and the Accused the same. The Parties being met, and the People got together, a grand Consultation was held, before they proceeded to Trial; in which it was agreed to use the Scales first; and a Committee of Men were appointed to search the Men, and a Committee of Women to search the Women, to see if they had any Thing of Weight about them, particularly Pins. After the Scrutiny was over, a huge great Bible belonging to the Justice of the Place was provided, and a Lane through the Populace was made from the Justices House to the Scales, which were fixed on a Gallows erected for that Purpose opposite to the House, that the Justice's Wife and the rest of the Ladies might see the Trial without coming amongst the Mob; and after the Manner of Moor-fields, a large Ring was also made. Then came out of the House a grave tall Man carrying the Holy Writ before the supposed Wizard, etc. (as solemnly as the Sword-bearer of London before the Lord Mayor). The Wizard was first put in the Scale, and over him was read a Chapter out of the Books of Moses, and then the Bible was put in the other Scale (which being kept down before) was immediately let go; but to great Surprize of the Spectators, Flesh and Bones came down plump, and outweighed that great Book by abundance. After the same Manner, the others were served, and their Lumps of Mortality severally were too heavy for Moses and all the Prophets and Apostles.
>
> ("Office," 1892, 149–150)

In this case, the intended effect of weighing people against Bibles, as implemented by King James of England (Malley, 2006), was achieved: the accused witches were exonerated by the method. The accusers, however, then resorted to the trial by water, throwing them into the river, which all the accused also survived and were henceforth freed.

In Homes

A number of reports advised that a Bible be one of the very first things moved into a new home:

> A broom, a loaf of bread, and a Bible should be the first things brought into a new house.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17039)

> When moving into a new house take in a Bible, a loaf of bread, and some salt. Put a little salt in each corner of the room, starting with the east corner and mentioning the Trinity, one part for each corner, and "Amen" for the last one.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17063)

> Just before going into a new house, open a Bible and lay it on the front doorstep; then pick up the Bible and enter the house. You will be lucky in that house.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 11298)

One report specified that the Bible, along with salt and oatmeal, should be placed in the cupboard (Fogel 1915, 148). This advice was sometimes specifically directed at young couples (Hand 1961, no. 4863, 4864). The reports were quite varied as to what benefits a Bible in the house would bring: "God in your house" (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 16333), godliness (Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 17040, 20117), good luck (Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 16342, 17061, 17064), good fortune (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17003), happiness (Hyatt 1935, no. 8182; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17004), or "peace and plenty" (Fogel 1915, 148). It seems that the Bible was considered generally beneficial, without there being any specific form its benefits might take. This interpretation is supported by the following report:

> On moving to a new home, the first thing taken over the threshold should be a Bible or something that makes good; be sure never to take anything sharp, or it will cut your luck.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17062)

In this report the Bible is merely the most prominent instance of a class of things that "make good," in contrast to things that have no beneficial effects. When individuals attributed specific benefits to the Bible, I suggest that these were largely individual, spontaneous elaborations—perhaps for the benefit of the folklore collectors—rather than part of the tradition. If this interpretation is correct, we would further expect: (1) that people's memories of the tradition would be specific about including a Bible among

the first items brought into a new home but would not be specific about the benefits of so doing; and (2) that the people reporting the traditions would not distinguish sharply between the different benefits attributed to Bibles. These could be easily tested in a community where the practice is current.

Once in a house, the Bible continued to exert protection while in the house, especially if opened:

> To have the Bible open in the house is good luck.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24811)

> If you leave a Bible open all the time in the house, no evil spirits will enter.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 26412)[2]

Conversely,

> Never sleep in a household that doesn't have a Bible.
> (Cannon, Hand, & Talley, 1984, no. 1993)

The presence of a Bible in a home was thus regarded as sufficient for blessing the occupants and protecting them against evil spirits. The specification to leave the Bible open will prove revealing.

On One's Person

As a Bible could protect a home, so also an individual person:

> To ward off bad luck, carry a Holy Book or charm.
> (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 10565)

> If you carry a Bible with you at all times, you will never die from any unnatural causes.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 27747)

This was applied particularly during wars:

> You will be safe from enemy fire if you carry a Bible on your person.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20723)

> Most of the people in informant's community bought small steel-plated Bibles with all the Psalms in it. They would send them to their boys in the service for protection.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20725)

Some traditions suggested instead a prayer book worn over the heart (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20724), mistletoe (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20721), or a shell with the soldier's name on it (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20722). There was also a notion that a Bible under one's left arm, combined with invocation of a Trinitarian formula, could make spirits answer questions (Hyatt, 1965, no. 15625).

Under One's Pillow

An oft-recommended practice was to put a Bible underneath one's pillow or bed (e.g., Creighton 1976, 49; Hyatt 1965, no. 8696). This was supposed to ensure peaceful, nightmare-free sleep (Brown 1952–1964, nos. 3487, 5705, 5706; Cavender 2003, p. 110; Hyatt 1965, nos. 5706, 5977, 7248; Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 1545, 1583, 4944, 5269; Sackett 1964, no. 17). But keeping a Bible under one's pillow could also protect against diseases (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 6777), sleep-walking (Hyatt 1965, no. 5950) (Brown 1952–1964, no. 5708), snoring (Hyatt 1965, no. 5934), talking in one's sleep (Hyatt 1965, no. 5939), ghosts (Creighton & Bauchman 1988: 74; Hyatt 1935, no. 10548; 1965, no. 15627), and witches (Hyatt 1935, nos. 9504, 9505; 1970, no. 482; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 25875; Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 3826). "Witch riding" is sometimes understood as a folk explanation for sleep paralysis, during which a person awakes in the middle of the night, unable to move, with a strong sense of danger and sometimes, vivid hallucinations. One might also see witch riding as a plausible explanation for awakening exhausted and covered in perspiration (and this bit of lore may have other psychological or social utility besides). A Bible afforded protection from witch-riding because

> A witch will have to read that Bible backwards before she can ride you. Sometimes it takes much longer—if they miss one word in one chapter the witch must go straight on back [start] again, and by dat time it's daybreak and they can't ride you.
>
> (Hyatt 1970: 147–48, brackets in original)

But the defense against witches was not limited to witch riding. A Bible under one's pillow also afforded protection against all sorts of witchcraft (McLean 1972: 27). Bibles could also be placed under the bed to protect a woman giving birth:

> In a case of child labor, cross hazel twigs, put them across an open Bible, and place them under the pillow.
>
> (Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 5)

Although this report does not specify the purpose of the procedure, the elements—the Bible and the crossed hazel twigs—were most often used for protection against witches.

The Bible's function was not always protective. It could be used also to speed a person's death, if that person was suffering:

> A man's wife was dying hard. Someone told him that her last hours would be eased if they put a Bible under her pillow. He did this and said it sure worked, for she died in about ten minutes.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 28676)

> Severe and prolonged death pangs can be stopped by putting an open Bible under the dying person's head.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 15110)

Many other objects could be placed under a person's pillow or bed and were said to achieve similar effects. There were also two more positive traditions related to having a Bible under one's pillow:

> If you suspect something to be done next morning may be forgotten, lay a Bible under your pillow and think about the matter just before going to sleep.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 3956)

> Wish just before you go to bed and then sleep with a Bible under your head.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 8696)

Whether these would have magical effects might be doubted, but not their psychological value.

Bible Gifting

Considering that Bibles were regarded as precious and personal possessions, one might expect that there would be lore regarding Bible gifting. Yet the only two traditions I found on this subject were directed to young couples:

> Giving your prospective mate a Bible before marriage is lucky.
>
> (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 4959)

But:

> It is believed to be unlucky for young lovers to give Bibles to each other.
>
> (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 4960)

It is not clear what to make of these reports, both from young women in Utah. Do they draw a distinction between a prospective mate and a lover to suggest that premarital sex reverses the effect of Bible gifting? Or—more likely in my view—are they simply contradictory traditions?

Determination of One's Future

Bibles were also employed to shape a child's future, especially with regard to occupation:

> Putting a child's navel cord into the family Bible would cause the child to grow up to be a preacher.
>
> (Parler & University of Arkansas Student Contributors 1962, vol. III: 204)

> The first time a baby comes to see you, put a Bible in its hand if you wish it to be a minister.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 3633)

> If the navel-string of a small child is put between the pages of a Bible, he will be kind, honest and good throughout his life.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 1966)

The most common career intervention involved the child's first louse:

> The first louse found in a child's head, if cracked on a tin cup, will make a dancer of the child; on a song-book, a singer; on the Bible, a reader; on the child's head, a simpleton!
>
> (Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 3702)

> Crack on a Bible the first louse found in a male baby's hair and he will become a preacher.
>
> (Brown 1952–1964, no. 209; Hyatt 1935, no. 2777; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 3634)

> The first louse found on a child's head should be cracked on the Bible. Then the child will not be a liar.
>
> (Roberts 1927, no. 1434)

As was the case with keeping a Bible under one's pillow, the practice of cracking a louse on a Bible was thought to have various meanings.

A very unusual superstition—found in just one report (Roberts 1927, no. 35)—alleged that cutting a baby's nails would cause the child to become a thief, unless the nails were clipped into an open Bible. Presumably the Bible is an alternative here to the ground or a waste bucket—wherever the informant assumed people usually deposited nail clippings.

CURES

Bibles could also be used in cures:

> The Bible could be placed under an infant's head, along with coarse salt in its hands and bacon at its feet, to cure convulsions.
>
> (Simon 1954: 3)

> Ruth Frey (Lehigh Count) powwowed for Harriet Miller's gall bladder when it "burst." Harriet said Mrs. Frey "detoxicated" her. She had Harriet sit in a chair and hold the Bible, then ran her hands over her. Harriet has one treatment every weak for four weeks. At the end of that time, the gall bladder was better.
>
> (Kriebel 2007: 275)

> If your nose bleeds, put a dime in a small sack, tie this about your neck, using a red-yarn string, and, having opened the Bible, say *In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, stop my nosebleed.*
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 4814, cf. also no. 5546)

Sometimes healing required something more active:

> If you have a lump on the back of your wrist, you can only get rid of it by slamming a Holy Bible on it.
>
> (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 3744)

> To cure a wen [boil], hit it with a Bible, with a blow hard enough to break the inner membrane of the tumor.
>
> (Grumbine 1905–1906: 278)

> Warts too could be dispatched by hitting them with a Bible (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 12553), though to get rid of a bursa, one must drop the Bible on it.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 8404)

Four-Leafed Clover

Several traditions advised putting four-leafed clovers into one's Bible (Browne 1958, no. 4093; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 32037):

> Putting a four-leaf clover in a Bible will bring a person good luck.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 862)

These traditions present a special challenge to interpretation: Was the good luck simply a consequence of having a four-leaf clover? Did the Bible add anything to the other charm's powers, or was it simply the readiest means for pressing and preserving the clover? Or would the practitioners themselves even make this distinction?

Repel Foul Weather

Bibles could also protect against, or even repel, foul weather:

> When it rains, put a glass of water and a Bible on the window sill.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 34847)

> To prevent a flood when it rains, put a Bible and a glass of water in the sink.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 34934)

> In a severe storm, open the Bible and turn it toward the direction the storm is coming, and the storm will abate.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 35094)

It may be significant that all three of these testimonies—the only ones bearing on the weather—were collected in Ohio. The first two are similar enough to be genetically related, but the third is quite unique in my experience.

Treatment of Bibles

Not surprisingly, it mattered how one treated a Bible. A Bible must not be left upon the floor (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 9953), thrown down (Hyatt 1935, no. 10574), or dropped (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24817). The following traditions recommends extraordinary precautions against such infractions:

> The Bible is holy and should be kept on the center of a table standing in the middle of your living room. Further, you must never place anything on top of the Bible.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 10571)

A Jewish tradition suggests a remedy:

> If you drop a Bible, you must pick it up and kiss it.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24818)

This practice was also observed for prayer books (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24819–24820), lest God be angered (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24820). Among Mormons, dropping the Book of Mormon was also thought to bring bad luck (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 9954).

Many traditions insisted that nothing should be placed upon the Bible (Brown 1952–1964, no. 3486; Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 24808–24810). This tradition was felt intuitively:

> The informant's mother believed firmly that one should never lay any other book on top of the Bible. It was tragedy to her when her father would sometimes forget and lay his newspapers on top of the Bible.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24809b)

I found similar intuitions among the modern evangelical Christians I studied (Malley 2004: Chapter 2). Bibles were also not to be treated carelessly

(Hyatt 1935, no. 10573; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24822), damaged (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 9950), lost (Hyatt 1935, no. 10570), or thrown away (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 9951):

> A bookmark placed upside down in a Bible is bad luck.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24816)

> It is a sin to mutilate the Bible in any way.
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 10572)

> My grandfather used to say it was bad luck to tear leaves out of a Bible.
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 13149)

> To lose or throw away a Bible brings bad luck.
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 13150)

Naturally, traditions like this last created a problem: what to do with Bibles that were falling apart. Here there were contradictory traditions:

> When your Bible tears up and you can't use it any longer, burn it or bury it, or all the plagues in it will fall on you.
> (Browne 1958, no. 4330)[3]

But:

> If you burn any part of the Bible, you will have "terrible luck."
> (Bruton 1948, no. 4, scare quotes in original)

And:

> The pages of the Bible will not burn.
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24825)

This difficulty of disposing of worn Bibles might lie behind the tradition of burying a Bible with a corpse:

> At one time it was rather customary to tie up the jaws of a corpse or to place a book under them, the book usually being the Bible.
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 10259)

Given the reluctance to discard a worn Bible, burying it with a family member may have served the dual purpose of keeping the deceased's jaw closed and safely—ritually—disposing of an expired Bible.

The respect for Bibles meant that Bibles must not even be maligned, according to one oft-reported story:

> Years ago a man knocked at a door of a home and asked the mistress to buy a Bible. She answered that she would rather have a devil in the house than a Bible. Her baby was born with horns.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 2430)

AMULETS

The foregoing testimonies referred to uses of whole Bibles as artifacts, but other traditions specified artifactual uses of specific Bible texts as amulets. Amulets—often called "tickets"—were pieces of paper upon which Bible verses were written, usually along with the patient's name and a concluding formula. Individual healers often used distinctive methods of preparing an amulet.

> To create an amulet, a powwower typically writes an incantation (usually incorporating a prayer or Bible verse) on a piece of paper, folds or rolls it up, and places it in a small bag that the client is to wear. My consultant Mrs. Schultz referred to an amulet made for her by a powwower ("brau doctor") in Center Valley, Lehigh County, as "a gigger." This white bag contained a prayer or Bible verse that she was to wear as a protective device. The powwower Daisy Dietrich makes such amulets as well. Her procedure is to write a Bible verse on a piece of paper and fold it into a triangle.
>
> (Kriebel 2007: 19)

Amulets could protect or harm. The following procedure was used to attack and kill a man who was hexing a baby:

> Now, the best way to get rid of a witch is to write you a ticket and go to a white oak tree and bore you a hole. Put that in there and take an iron rod, push in there and [slaps her hand on an imaginary rod]. It'll hurt 'em. If it don't kill 'em, it'll hurt 'em. Now that's what [a man] done to [a baby]. And [a woman's] daddy was the one puttin' the spell on the baby. It wasn't, I think about three days, he died. [The man,] just [by following this formula,] knocked him flat.
>
> (Milnes 2007: 78, brackets in original)

But the treatment of tickets depended on what precisely was being treated:

> If someone bewitches a cow . . . a ticket would be tied in her tail to direct the cure. Other methods include placing amulets in the barn. Sometimes the tickets are sewn up in rags and carried by people for protection.
>
> (Milnes 2007: 79)

Preparations could be quite complex:

> That evening we'd go to milk and the one cow . . . you didn't get milk, you got blood. Well I said, "Mom, the Devil's on her." I said, "Her milk ain't worth a whoop." I said, "Her calf'll starve." So Mom made her calf go over in a pen and we let her cow . . . that had the bloody milk . . . we let her calf go over and finish the other cows. Mom said, "I'll fix her." Said, "Come on, I'll fix her." She said, "Milk out what she's got, on the ground." She said, "Here's my strip cup. Milk me out some in it." I said, "What are we going to do. Can't sell the cow like this." She said, "No." She said, "Come on, let's go to the house." She went in the house and there's a verse in the Bible where you can write a ticket. She wrote that ticket, put it, put it in that milk, and beat it up. "Now," she said, "Dove, go out and get me a handful of good dry chips." I went out and got her a water bucket full of chips, you know, where Dad split wood . . . little shivers. [I] brought it in. She put [the milk and chips] in the cook stove. I'll bet you she poured a quart of coal oil in it. [She] set it on fire and poured that in, and [said] the three highest names. It wasn't an hour till [a woman] come up and she was just madder than the devil. She just cut a heck of a shine. Mom said, "You done me dirty." She said, "You get the hell down the road and stay down the road and don't come back." Well, she left. I said, "Mom, old Speck will have bloody milk again this evening." "No," she said. "Ain't." She said, "I'm gonna write a ticket and tie it in the end of her tail in the hair." Well, she went and wrote a ticket and went out in the field and tied the ticket in the cow's . . . that long hair [end of the tail]. She parted that hair and tied it right up here where the cow'd switch her tail, [so] she wouldn't throw the ticket away.
>
> (Milnes 2007: 144–45, brackets in original)

The kind of preparation varied depending on one's situation and intent. In contrast to the manifold uses of whole Bibles as artifacts, I found only a handful of texts used on amulets. The majority of these were from the Psalms.

> In a house containing a newborn infant, a plaque bearing a selection from Psalms is placed on the walls of the bedroom for seven days to keep away evil spirits.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 3312)

> Most of the people in informant's community bought small steel-plated Bibles with all the Psalms in it. They would send them to their boys in the service for protection.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20725)

> A traveler may avert danger by writing Psalm 16 on a piece of paper and wearing it in the pit of the left arm.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 8348)

> A headache can be cured, or at least helped, if a Bible opened to the 23rd Psalm is placed on the head.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 9981)

> In war times copies of the 9lst Psalm pinned over the heart will protect the heart from being struck. This charm was used extensively in World War I.
>
> (Puckett 1981, no. 6857; cf. also no. 20726)

Psalm 91, written on special paper with what was thought to be dove's blood, was also used for general protection (Hyatt 1970, 3185–86).

The Lord's Prayer was used as an amulet:

> A patient who had tuberculosis said he kept a copy of the Lord's Prayer pasted to his chest and that it was curing his disease.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 11925)

As was Matthew 16:23:

> Dovie says that to make a ticket, one need only have a scrap of paper on which you write a Bible verse: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourist not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). Then, she says, you write the person's name and "Father, Son and Holy Ghost," referred to as the "three highest names." Once written, some physical harm is done to the ticket. Among the various instances recounted to me by Davie and her sister, the ticket was burned with fire, "jobbed" full of holes, or cut with a knife. To cure cows giving bloody milk, a ticket is put into the milk and mixed with kerosene and burned. The ticket may also be pushed into a hole in an oak tree in which an iron rod is inserted and hit with a hammer, thus smashing the ticket inside.
>
> (Milnes 2007: 82)

Another charm against witchcraft used John 1:14:

> When I was young I was sleeping upstairs. Every night and every night when I would go to bed the door would open but I couldn't see nothin'. About two minutes afterward it was in the bed, just as if it was a cat or a dog. I used to get up and shut the door and then it would open again. It went on that way for 2 or 3 years, and it used to pull the bed-clothes off the bed. Then my uncle said, "I've got a charm for witchcraft", and he took nine letters from the German Bible and he put them on a board backwards and put the board up over the door. From that time on it never come again. The witch would go over the board but not under it.

> There are ten words in English. They mean, "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us."
>
> (Creighton 1976: 49)

The details of this procedure are without any parallel I know, but the use of the first chapter of John for protection dates back to medieval times (Malley 2006).

I have called all of the foregoing uses artifactual because in them the text artifacts—Bibles or Bible texts—are touched, kept, worn, or consumed but not read or expounded. That is, their semantic properties serve as the background for these uses but are not part of the practices themselves; the scriptures were regarded as efficacious objects. In contrast, the next group of practices involved the reading or recitation—the performance—of some biblical text.

SIMPLE PERFORMATIVE USES

Performative uses of the Bible are actions where either biblical text in general or a specific text from the Bible is used as a text—that is, as an ordered series of words to be read or spoken. Texts, as abstractions, do not have physical properties, though their performance does.

General

The simplest textual use of the Bible is simply Bible reading, and this activity was thought to have special benefits including protection from the evil eye (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24814) and the removal of spells (Brown 1952–1964, no. 5578). Bible reading itself could have ritualistic elements:

> I usually read one chapter in the Bible each evening before retiring. If the chapter has an even number of verses in it, I stop at the end. If an odd number, I must read one verse in the next chapter, in order to make the number even. If the first verse in the following chapter does not have a period at the end of it, but has a comma, colon, or semi-colon, I must read two more verses, and so on, until I reach the end of an even-numbered verse followed by a period. I don't believe this is a superstition.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24813)

In a ghost story from Louisiana, three individuals read the Bible forward and backward to protect themselves from a ghost and to drive it off (Bergen 1899). A footnote explains, "Reading the Bible backward is supposed to keep ghosts from entering; reading it forward, to prevent them (if already

in the house) from harming one." In the story, however, this method proved inadequate: after two of the men fled, the third was decapitated by the ghost. Treasure-seekers were generally advised to bring Bibles with them, in case they should run into ghosts guarding the treasure (Boggs 1934, no. 17, Version B; "Ghosts as guardians of hidden treasure," 1899; Saxon, Dreyer, & Tallant 1945: 266).

In some cases, a person's intention while reading was important:

> Years ago a man was living on Sixth Street and he had a boy that his nose would start to bleeding every night. They tried everything, but every night it would start at nine o'clock. Someone told this man that there was an old German woman on that block that could throw a spell over you, and as they [the father and the old woman] were not speaking, maybe she was putting the spell on the boy; and if he would get up before sunup and read the Bible, wishing it back on whoever put the spell on the boy, and read again just before sundown—do this every day until the boy got well. This man started reading the Bible every morning before sunup and every evening before sundown, wishing whoever put the spell on the boy would get it. The boy got well and this old German woman got sick for a long time.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 16506, brackets in original)

One remedy for a bad dream involved applying to the contents of a nightmare a relevant verse from scripture:

> If a person has a bad dream he should recite immediately upon awakening a Bible verse suggested by the dream which contains a promise of good.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 4945)

> The person who has had a bad dream can cancel its effect by reading a verse from the Bible next morning.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 7249)

A prescribed morning prayer (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 4946) was another way of warding off the evil thought to be brought on by bad dreams (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 4943). This advice may have been tied to an assumption, evidenced in other reports, that nightmares would bring bad luck.

Specific Passages

Most performative uses, however, relied upon specific, prescribed passages from the Bible. A Jewish tradition used the Shema Yisrael to protect against ghosts:

> To drive off a ghost, take four steps and recite the following passage: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one."
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 29770)

The description here of the Shema as a passage suggests that it was significant that it was from the Bible, but it may well have been regarded as an efficacious utterance in its own right.

Similarly, the Ten Commandments could be used for protection against bad luck:

> If a black cat crosses your path, it is bad luck. You can cancel the bad luck if you will repeat the Ten Commandments under your breath while backing across the path the cat has made.
>
> (Puckett, et al. 1981, no. 21342)

In this case, it may be significant that the commandments are memorized: as with the Shema, they may have been regarded as a magical formula in their own right.

The most popular book of the Bible for magical use was the Psalms, which was often regarded as a kind of charm book (Kriebel 2007: 151):

> There are special Psalms to say against the spirits that might harm a childbirth.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 587)

> When a person is critically ill, the recitation of various Psalms will be effective against evil spirits.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 7150)

> An interviewee remarked that the reading of certain Psalms helped an individual to benefit from particular misfortunes. The 27th Psalm was read to rid oneself of the blues, while the 37th was good for increasing financial wealth. Psalm 126 was a source of inspiration if one were worried about a job, and the 91st would ease the feeling of lonesomeness.
>
> (Pyatt & Johns 1999: 42)

> The Bible is also of immense importance in maintaining spiritual health. In inner-city Miami it was found to be especially important for Bahamian and Southern Black respondents, especially the reading of the Psalms. One small group of individuals were asked to indicate which ones they used most frequently and to what end; 37 different Psalms were mentioned, 7 of which were reported as helpful in maintaining a sense of well-being.
>
> (Psalms 23; 27; 29; 37; 38; 40; and 51). (Snow 1993: 90–91)

Specific Psalms were used for particular purposes. The following testimony, though somewhat confusing, describes how a woman consumed ammonia and baking soda and read Psalms 7 and 8 in order to repel witchcraft.

> I was sitting to my machine sewing when I had taken sick in this arm and in the spine of my back; felt just like a chill begin to run over me. And from there my heart begin to beat too fast and I thought once or twice that I might just had a dumb chill when it first struck me. And my mind just lead me to get up and I'd gotten up from my machine and I walks to my front porch and I sits down. And then another spirit told me to pray and I prayed. And whilst I was doing that I walked on a ways and I come back and had taken some medicine. From there on I ranged [rang = telephoned] up my brother that I thought that I had a stroke or was taking one from the way I was and he came to me. And from there they prevailed with me to go to someone that knowed a little more than I did. And they [the doctor] told me how come that I had it; that EZ [sewing] machine was dressed on this side. And the chair that I setting in, it had—liquid was poured in it and from there I lost the use of this arm, had no use for it. And when I'd stand up my heart would just go so that I had to lie down. But it wasn't but one thing cured me and that was that ammonia and cooking soda. And then they told me how come I to get it. I got it through a piece of meat and by my machine was dressed and chair. And the minute that I begin to take it and begin to read the Bible, it begin to leave me. (You did what?) I read the 7th Chapter, Psalms of David, in the morning and the 7th and 8th of Psalms, I read it in the afternoon, and before noon I'd taken that teaspoon of soda and ammonia. You don't drap the medicine, cause when the Bible speaks of witchcraft you shouldn't drap it; you should pour a certain amount instead of drapping it, cause if you drap it, it'll do you just as much harm if you hadn't taken it. You pour it. . . . Just hold it and pour it—a certain amount as you think you should take into the glass, instead of drapping it. Well, that's what I'd taken and then from there on I begin to rub this arm with alcohol to help to gain the strength back and by reading the Psalms of David—just taking it right back to the one who put it on me. . . . I'd taken the medicine in the morning and read the chapter right along with it.
>
> (Hyatt 1970, no. 966)

In addition to Psalms 7 and 8, mentioned here, other curative Psalms were Psalm 18 for sickness (Hyatt 1935, no. 4301); Psalm 19 for infertility (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 91); Psalm 23 for insomnia (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 10304), nervousness (Hyatt 1935, no. 5461; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 7320), sickness caused by witchcraft (Hyatt 1970, 444), and general trouble (Hurston 1931: 320); Psalm 27 for depression (Pyatt & Johns 1999: 42); and Psalm 91 for loneliness (Pyatt & Johns 1999: 42).

Psalms were used also to remedy relationship problems:

> To obtain the good will of old friends, pray every morning and evening the 133rd Psalm.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 10676)

Marital issues were of particular concern: The recitation of Psalm 70 was part of a procedure (also involving a pair of the man's socks) for turning a man's affection away from another woman and toward oneself (Hyatt 1970: 1324). The following report recommends Psalms 53–55 for the same purpose, I believe:

> If you want to break someone up from running around, read Psalms 53, 54 and 55 three times at a time and three times a day, and wish they will stop running around and they will stop.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 9456)

If the person had already left, Psalm 133, prayed three times a day, would bring him back (Hyatt, 1935, no. 9455; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 23288). Psalms 65 and 69 were said to cure one's husband of alcoholism (Hyatt 1970: 3164).

Some Psalms were said to bring good luck:

> The first thing every morning before speaking to anyone, read Psalm 23 and make a wish. This will bring you success.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 6580)

> The day before moving, go to the new house and read Psalm 62; and you will have good luck in that house.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 8196)

Psalm 35, read before seeking work, could help bring employment (Hyatt 1970: 1020). Reading Psalms 37, 65, or 72 was supposed to bring money (Hyatt 1935, nos. 8482, 8599, 8600). Psalms 37 and 82 helped one to succeed in business (Hyatt 1935, no. 8481; 1970, 752). Exodus 30 and Psalm 23 were together supposed to lead a person to hidden treasure (Hyatt 1970: 1588–1589).

Other Psalms could be used for protection. Daily recitation of Psalms 23 or 77 served for general protection (Hyatt 1935, no. 10675). Psalms 112–114 were part of a procedure to ward off harm (Hyatt 1970: 892–893). Psalm 116, prayed daily with devout trust in God, would save one from a violent death (Hyatt 1935, no. 10674). Psalm 121, prayed seven times, would protect the solitary night traveler from accidents (Hyatt 1935, no. 8349).

Psalms 22 and 35 were employed as part of practices designed to help people prevail in legal cases (Hurston 1931: 388–389; Hyatt 1970: 1003).

Psalm 30 could free a person from prison (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 7569). Psalm 35 could protect a person engaged in illegal activity from arrest (Hyatt 1970: 1253–1254).

If someone was trying to harm you, you might be advised to read Psalms 100 and 35:1 as part of a magical procedure to protect you—and to cause your enemy to get into trouble or even kill himself (Hyatt 1970: 1765). Psalms 23, 37, and 108 together were said to "silence" a traveling spirit (Hyatt 1970: 23). Psalm 91 was used to ward off harmful candle magic and to burn down the witch's home (Hyatt 1970: 467):

> Well, whenever they're trying to harm you, if it's with a candle, you take the Bible and you get up every morning just before sunrise, look to the east and you make a prayer. Then you read a verse in the Psalms, the 91st Psalm, which is supposed to be one of the strongest Psalms of David. You read it—a verse out of that backwards. Stead of reading it down, you reads it backwards every morning for nine mornings straight. (Would that make the candle go out?) Yeah, reading this Bible backwards for nine mornings, that'll put that candle out and set the house on fire. (I see. And set the house on fire?) It'll set the house on fire. (I see, I see.) Cause they generally have the candle in a closed space and wherever that is, the heat'll be so that it will ignite. The way the candle'll do it, it will bend over and eventually burn the paper—whatever they got under there. Sometimes they writes your name for nine times on this paper, backwards and forwards, probably crossways. But you must use an indelible pencil, see. And sometimes the candle drops over—it's always a matter that it looks like it's a accidental way to do. It'll drop over and probably burn the scarf or ketch the paper wherever the wax have run, you see, and it will set fire. I've seen it happen many times.
>
> (Hyatt 1970: 853)

As some reports have already hinted, Psalm magic could be used aggressively. To get revenge on someone who has wronged you, you could perform a procedure involving a new jar of new wine and new mustard, along with Psalm 109 (Hyatt 1970: 1141). Psalms could even kill:

> To kill an enemy: Set your altar table with black and white candles. Put a mirror in the center and a white basin of water and a sharp knife or dagger. Read the scripture [Psalm 35:1] "Plead my cause, O God, with them that strive against me. Fight against them that fight against me." Then the looking glass will show you your enemy, known or unknown. When he appears, chop the water with the blade and it turns to blood in the basin. In two or three hours the enemy is dead.
>
> (Hurston 1931: 324)

> Read Psalm 55. It is fatal to your enemies. While reading it, mention a certain name and that party will suffer much.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 9229)

> To catch a thief: Hang three sprigs of broomweed about the neck of the suspect and recite Psalm 50:18, and if he is the guilty one it will choke him to death.
>
> (Hurston 1931: 324)

In North America, as in Britain, the Psalter was widely viewed as a charm book, particularly among Hoodoo practitioners, who often used the Psalms in combination with the apocryphal Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses (e.g., Hyatt 1970: 1128, 1588–1589, 1752).

The prophetic book of Ezekiel, too, seems to have been in frequent use. Ezekiel 9 was part of a cure for St. Vitus Dance:

> Tilly Noll took her nine-year-old daughter to a male powwower from Terre Hill (Lancaster County). The man's office was lined with books. His hands moved over the girl and he whispered, but she could not hear what she was saying. She thinks that he was speaking out of the Bible (Ezekiel 9). The treatment took nine weeks, during which time the daughter was to follow Tilly all the time. They went to see the powwower once a week, on Sundays. At the end of that time, the symptoms started to disappear. Tilly noted that the condition came on slowly and went away slowly. The man received a weekly payment "in the two- or three-dollar range."
>
> (Kriebel 2007: 254)

But to judge from the frequency of reports, the single most common charm was the use of Ezekiel 16:6 to stop bleeding (Browne 1958, no. 493; Bruton 1948, no. 33; Hand 1961, nos. 881, 882; Hyatt 1965, no. 4773; Milnes 2007: 102; Parler & University of Arkansas Student Contributors 1962, no. 2782; Puckett 1981, no. 10721; Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 1078).[4] A couple of reports will give the flavor of this practice:

Mary Cottrell explains her experience with stopping blood:

> I can stop that. In Ezekiel. It's right in the Bible. "When I passed by thee and you was polluted in your blood, I said live!" And you say the person's name, and say that nine times. I had a boy fell at school and cut his tongue [and it was] bleeding. And I said that and the blood just stopped right now. If you say it too fast it makes you sick. But if you're out someplace and someone cuts theirself and you say that; it stops the blood. I can tell a man . . . and she can tell a man, or he can tell a woman, but you don't say it for the same sex.

> Now [a woman] called in here at eleven o'clock one night. And she said, Waneta, [a woman] is a-hemorrhaging to death, would you stop blood? I said, well can't you do it. She said, I ain't got that much faith. So . . . I knew her all my life . . . so I asked her her name and all. I can't remember anything, I read it off. I carry it [the written verse] with me all the time. I read it off two or three times. The next day at two o'clock [she] called. That was unusual. [She] said Waneta, she said they called back and they said that [she] was just fine that she stopped hemorrhaging right now. But she said, "I didn't have the faith." I believe in all that stuff. I could tell you but I couldn't tell her [another woman]. Now the first I used that, Leroy was here and he had a pup. And I wouldn't let him keep it in the house, so they went up to the shed to sleep, and he cut his leg like this [slashes at her leg]. The blood was just a-streaming, all over the place. That's the first time I ever tried it. Well, I thinks I better try to stop that. I got that much faith. I'm no Jehovah['s Witness] or nothin', but I can help that with faith. When they got him into the hospital, Doctor Hoylman said to him, he said, "I don't understand." He said, "It's cut that there artery and the blood's just a-layin' there." Leroy said, "I don't know, it just quit all at once." Well, I never told a soul. We was out here on the ridge past High Knob at a homemaker-meetin'. And they said they wanted somebody to come and give [a neighbor] some blood, she's floodin' to death. And I thinks well, good Lord, I can stop that. I just got that piece of paper and held it up in front of me like I's readin'. And they called back and said, "She done quit—she's perfect now, a miracle happened, but they didn't know how."
>
> (Milnes 2007: 102–103, brackets in original)

It is likely Ezekiel 16:6 that is in view in the many remedies for cuts where the specific verse is omitted (Anderson 1970: 25; Brown 1952–1964, no. 1624; Browne 1958, no. 492; Saxon et al. 1945: 528).

From the New Testament, the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13) was used to cure anger (Hyatt 1965, no. 4771), cancer (Hyatt 1965, no. 6281), freckles (Hyatt 1965, no. 5857), hiccups (Dorson & Leary 2008: 117), injury (Hyatt 1970, no. 995), insomnia (Snow 1973: 278), nosebleeds (Alger 1892; Hyatt 1965, no. 4771), stuttering (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 11583), sweeny (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 31693), and teething (Hendricks 1980: 102). The Lord's Prayer could be used to ward off bad luck (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 17742) or bring good luck (Hyatt 1935, no. 10678). It could also be used to cleanse a new house (Hyatt 1970: 1579). An interesting report describes the use of the Lord's Prayer to force a hostile neighbor to make peace:

> I had an enemy. She was talking about me at the time and saying things that were not so. One morning I got up and wrote her name

> on a piece of paper before sunrise and went out in the yard and buried it, standing, looking to the east, and saying the Lord's Prayer. I did this for seven mornings. Right after that, this woman got real sick and sent for me and told me she was very sorry for what she had done.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 9193)

Matthew 28:18–20 was used as a cure for burns (Kirkland 1992: 42–43).

The famous opening to the gospel of John was used as a cure for nosebleed (Bruton 1948, no. 34). John 14 was used as part of a cure for sneezing:

> A Hagerstown, Md., woman . . . followed her advice to "lay your finger on her upper lip as near the nostrils as possible and press hard" by this autobiographic bit: "I tried all kinds of physicians and here is the cure I did. I read the 14th chapter of St. John in the Bible. It is a great thing for God will heal when the specialists have failed."
>
> (Kanner 1942: 282)

It seems also to have been thought to grant bedtime wishes (Hyatt 1965, no. 8695).

Finally, reading Revelation 7 was supposed to end bad luck (Brown 1952–1964, no. 3488) and help you to succeed (Puckett 1968: 567), especially in a lawsuit involving money (Hyatt 1970: 1763–1764).

Bible verses were used for many other things too. Unspecified texts were used for the cure of abscesses (Creighton 1968: 194), atrophy ("sweeny") (Milnes 2007: 105), bee stings (Gourley 1954: 8), birthmarks (Creighton 1968: 196; Puckett et al. 1981, no. 1098), bloating in cattle (Kriebel 2007: 251–52), blood in cow's milk (Milnes 2007: 144–45), burns (Burgin 1960: 17; Clark 1966, no. 177; Milnes 2007: 95; Randolph 1947: 121), cellulitis of the leg (Brown 1952–64, 1015), erysipelas (Kriebel 2007: 251; Whitney & Bullock 1925, no. 1828), goiter (Randolph 1947: 125–26), being hide-bound (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 2703), infertility (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 228), jaundice (Jones 1949: 490), mental disorders (Hyatt 1935, no. 9617), poison oak (Milnes 2007: 102), screwworm (Anderson 1968: 168), "snake in the stomach" (an elaborate hoodoo cure) (Hyatt 1970, no. 3083), sores (Kriebel 2007: 273), toothache (Cavender 2003: 107; Creighton 1968, no. 367; Farr 1935, no. 21), tumors (Creighton 1968, no. 381), warts (Anderson 1968: 88; Brown 1952–1964, no. 2690; Kriebel 2007: 249; Milnes 2007: 95; Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 12551–52)—including warts on a horse (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 31696),—and whooping cough (Kriebel 2007: 252–53). In relation to spirits, an unspecified Bible verse could make a ghost tell what it is seeking (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 29769),[5] and another could protect from witches (Milnes 2007: 89).

Mixed Uses

Mixed uses are uses that draw upon both the textual and artifactual properties of the Bible. The following practice, for instance, combines recitation of a biblical text with the technique of hitting oneself in the head with a Bible:

> If you have a bleeding nose, hit yourself on the head with a Bible, say a verse, and it will stop bleeding.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 10720)

The most common mixed use was when a charm was applied while the patient sat and held a Bible (Kriebel 2007: 275). One healer claimed she could heal people either in person or remotely if she knew the person's full name and ailment and if the patient sat in a chair facing east, holding a Bible (Kriebel, 2007, 66).

Sometimes a Bible was to be opened to a relevant passage and placed upon the patient. For a woman in a difficult labor, a Bible was opened to "some passage describing birth throes" and set across her stomach (Hyatt 1965, no. 2963). A headache could be cured by opening the Bible to the 23rd Psalm and placing it on the person's head (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 9981). These practices suggest that contact with a Bible was important, but the following two traditions require just proximity:

> For nose-bleeding, hold a Bible over the sufferer's head and read Ezekiel 16:6, three times.
>
> (Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 1096)

> He also gave her sweet-smelling salts for ritual baths to cleanse her system of the curse. He told her to pray for healing, suggested a particular set of scriptural readings and admonished her to sleep with a Bible opened to the 23d Psalm under her mattress.
>
> (Snow 1993: 28)

A similar tradition holds that a Bible kept open to Psalm 35 will keep law enforcement officers from interfering in one's affairs (Hyatt 1970: 1369), and a cure for a stomach ailment involved a Bible opened to the 23rd Psalm under the sufferer's mattress (Snow 1983: 827).

In the following story, the narrator read Psalm 91 and slept with a Bible under his head to protect himself against a ghost:

> Ten years ago a white woman was playing a piano on C. Street and her husband shot her while she was at the piano. Not long after that her brother died very sudden in the dining room. After that everyone said the house was haunted. I didn't care. I moved into the house. I was sleeping in the front room and my son was in the room back

> of me. I could always hear knocking on the door and my bed, but I did not care. Every night this woman came and stand by my son's bed and look at him, then walk around the bed and then disappear through the window. My son always slept with a revolver under his pillow. This spirit came one night and pulled the revolver from under my son's pillow and throw the gun down on his feet. Then I did get afraid. I thought maybe this ghost would kill him some night. I got the Bible and read the Ninety-first Psalm and prayed, and made him sleep with the Bible under his head. And the spirit did not bother him any more. I went and moved my bed out of the front room into the dining-room. Someone said, "That room is haunted too!" But I was not afraid. Only, I saw the spirit one time, and the man came to my bed one night. He was tall. His hands were cold and his finger-nails long. I could just feel them sticking in my side. He was trying to lift me out of bed. This spirit got me to the edge of the bed, then disappeared. Then I got up and read the Ninety-first Psalm and put the Bible under my head. After that we did not see any more spirits in that house. But the closet door would always open when I would go near it. I never had to open it.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 15626)

Interestingly, the narrator could do the Bible reading for his son, but the son had to sleep with his own Bible pillow. The following report also involves such a mixed artifactual and textual use to repel ghosts.

> In reality, however, the Bible is used to ward off ghosts. Get some one to read a verse from the Bible backwards to you [if you cannot read]. . . Fold the page, place a knife and fork within it, and put it under your pillow. No ha'nt will enter your house. Reading the Bible backwards is supposed to prevent ghosts from entering; reading it forward, to keep them from harming one if they are already in the house.
>
> (Puckett 1968, 141)

This report is now the second reference to the idea of reversing the action of the text by reversing the order of the words.

Psalms 7:1 (written), 120 (recited), and 150 (mode unspecified) were combined used as part of a ritual for prevailing as a defendant in a court case (Hurston 1931: 374).

Finally, I came across a report of miraculous literacy, wherein a seventy-year-old woman learned to read. After holding her Bible in her hands while she prayed for three days, then opening it and having her eyes fall upon John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," she was suddenly able to read. Quite curiously, she is reported to have read subsequently only from Genesis ("Miracle," 1950).

BIBLIOMANTIC USES

In addition to their use in magical procedures, Bibles were also used in divination. These mantic uses could turn on Bibles' artifactual properties, textual properties, or—most commonly—both.

ARTIFACTUAL USES

Artifactual uses of the Bible in divination are those uses of the Bible-as-artifact or its texts-as-artifacts that make use of their physical properties.

Future Occupation

One of the most common divinatory practices involved setting a variety of objects before an infant and observing the result. Whichever object the child chooses will be its future occupation.

> Put a baby on a floor with a Bible, a deck of cards, and a silver dollar. If it picks up the Bible first, it will be a preacher; if it picks the cards up first, it will be a gambler; and if it picks up the dollar first, it will be a financier.
>
> (Farr 1939, no. 14)

> Place a baby on the floor with a bottle, a Bible, and some money before it. If he picks up the bottle first, he will be a drunkard when he grows up; if he takes up the Bible, he will be a minister; and if he plays with the money, he will be rich.
>
> (Brown 1952–64, no. 205)

> Objects sometimes used to indicate one's life work and fortune are an account book, to indicate a businessman, a book upon a secular subject, to indicate a student (the Bible always indicating the preacher), part of an Army uniform to indicate a soldier, etc.
>
> (Brown 1952–64, no. 208)

This tradition was attested in many variants, principally having to do with the age of the child and the particular set of objects and their interpretation (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 1316; Farr 1935, no. 120; Hyatt 1965, no. 3525, 3527, 3529, 3532; Puckett 1981, no. 3648). There were variants of this tradition that did not use a Bible among the objects presented to the baby (e.g., Hyatt 1965, nos. 3523–3524, 3626, etc.), and even in the variants that did involve a Bible, the role of the Bible was essentially as a representation of a vocation, the same as the other objects, and nothing about the divinatory procedure turned on any special property of the Bible. Some

traditions suggested a prayer book (Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 3648, 3651), a hymnal (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 3636), or a rosary (e.g., Puckett et al. 1981, nos. 3649–3650) could also be used in place of a Bible.

Another common form of divination used a Bible under a pillow in order to divine one's future spouse:

> Sleep with a Bible under your head for three successive nights and you will see your allotted mate in your dreams.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 7000; 1965, no. 9406; Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 225)

As we will see below, romantic interests figured prominently among subjects for divination.

Performative Uses

I found few purely performative uses—that is, uses where Bibles or Bible passages were used for their textual properties alone. In the main they were forms of romantic divination.

> Down south of Hot Springs, Arkansas, they tell me that a girl goes out in the woods after a rain and "repeats a verse"—meaning a passage from the Bible. Then she reaches behind her without looking and lifts up a flat stone. Under the stone she'll find a hair, and it will be the same color as that of the man she is destined to marry.
>
> (Randolph 1947: 174)

> Read the Book of Solomon backward, and go to bed without speaking, and you will dream of your future wife or husband.
>
> (Brown: 1952–1964, no. 4347)

> Read the third chapter of the Song of Solomon, walk to bed backward, lie on the right side until you go to sleep, and you will dream about the person you are going to marry.
>
> (Brown 1952–1964, no. 4348)

Regarding this last practice, an informant commented:

> I know a lady who claims to have tried this, and says it came true. She even dreamed of her husband, and not only got an impression of him that stayed with her, but also got an impression of the home he lived in. She claims she had a perfect mental picture of the home and man, and the first time he ever came to see her, she realized he was the one she saw in her dreams.
>
> (Brown 1952–1964, no. 4348)

The next testimony is quite peculiar, and I suspect a joke, because the seventh word of Matthew 7:7 (KJV) is "you."

> Find Matthew the seventh chapter, the seventh verse, and the seventh word will be the one you marry.
>
> (Brown 1952–1964, no. 4343)

It is also possible that this testimony was given in a context where the number seven was motivated, perhaps, by someone's date of birth—but if so, the report gives no hint of it.

"Birth fortune" testimonies usually involve the divination of a person's overall fortune by using a chapter from the Bible and selecting the verse from the day of the month when the person was born. The following testimony is the only American instance of this type that I have been able to find.

> Birth fortune can be told in the book of Proverbs, Chapter 21 for men, and Chapter 31 for women.
>
> (Brown 1952–1964, no. 204)

So, because I am a man born on September 7, my fortune is told by Proverbs 21:7 (KJV):

> The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.

Well . . . that's just terrific. Real promising.

Mixed Uses

The majority of divinatory practices employing the Bible involved both artifactual and performative aspects.

THE SORTES BIBLICAE

Easily the most common divinatory practice in this category was the sortes Biblicae, also called Bible dipping. The essential feature of the sortes Biblicae was to exploit the codex format of the Bible to select a page at random, and often an area of the page, and then to search the text thereon for a relevant statement.

> All answers to all problems can be found in the Bible. Place the hand on the Bible, say a fervent prayer, slip your finger into the Bible without looking, and let the finger stop when you feel the urge. The answer will be found in that chapter.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24828)

> Well you know when you are real puzzled about something, that you can't find the answer, you just say the Lord's Prayer and open the Bible and put your finger on a verse, and usually that will answer the question for you.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24829)

> I have heard that around here they have used the Bible for casting lots and for guidance. They would stick a knife into a closed Bible and then open it, and where the tip of the knife pointed, they would read that verse and make their decision according to their interpretation of that verse. The people around here mostly came from New England, and I think that must be a New England belief.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24830)

> If you have to make a decision, open the Bible and point to a word without looking. Open your eyes; if the word is "Yea," go ahead, but if the word is "Nay," then do not go ahead with what you may be considering, because it would be unwise.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24831)

> Opening the Bible at Genesis and reading a few passages at random before beginning to tell fortunes with cards will give you a general idea of your luck to come.
>
> (Puckett 1968: 567)

New Year's Day provided a particularly apt occasion for carrying out the sortes Biblicae, as a means of divining one's general fortune for the coming year. According to these traditions, one's fortune was given by an entire chapter—as if the length of the year, with its many varied events, required a lengthier passage of scripture to foretell.

> On New Year's Day just open your Bible and read the first chapter you opened to. That will be your fortune for the coming year.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24832–33)

> The Bible is opened on New Year's Day at random, and one's fortune for the year foretold from the chapter.
>
> (Brown 1952–1964, no. 3489)

However, the method could also be applied to very specific sorts of problems.

> If you should lose an object, go to the general area where it was lost and then read any selection from the Bible, and it will tell you where to locate the lost article.
>
> (Cannon et al. 1984, no. 6945)

In another variant of this practice, a person was to make a wish, and then open the Bible to determine whether it would come true:

> Make a wish, turning the Bible and if on that page it says: "It came to pass," your wish will come true.
>
> (Farr 1935, no. 213)

> The Negro generally makes a wish, then opens his Bible. If he happens on the words, "and it shall come to pass," then he believes his wish will be granted.
>
> (Puckett 1968: 567)

> When you want a wish to come true, get a Bible, open it three times and make your wish, and the third time, if you read, "And it came to pass," you will get your wish.
>
> (Browne 1958, no. 3365)

This practice was widely reported, with relatively few variations (Allison 1950; Hand 1961, nos. 3490–3491; Hyatt 1935, no. 6473; 1965, no. 8697; Puckett 1981, no. 24827; Roberts 1927, no. 70; Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 195). It was also performed with reference to a different saying:

> If you open the Bible and your finger rests on the words, "Verily, verily"—it is a sign of good luck.
>
> (Hyatt 1935, no. 10575; cf. also Hyatt 1965, no. 13151; Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 3914)

All of these traditions present this procedure as an informative one only, but as one reads them, one gets the impression that the Bible is somehow thought to be an agent in making the wish come true. This interpretation is supported by the following testimony:

> When you want a wish to come true, get a Bible, open it three times and make your wish, and the third time, if you read, "And it came to pass," you will get your wish.
>
> (Browne 1958, no. 3365)

Here the divination is presented as a means of making the wish come true, an attitude akin to magical manipulation.

THE BIBLE & KEY

The ancient practice of coscinomancy survived into modern times as the Sieve & Shears, and—in a form relevant to our present concern—the Bible & Key (Malley 2006; "Questions and answers," 1922). There were

many procedural variants, but the following description is reasonably typical of the version used to detect a thief:

> Two of our interviewees from South Carolina confirmed that to detect whether a person had lied or stolen something, a grandfather's clock key, a long piece of string, and a Bible were needed. The string was placed between the pages of the Bible and closed. The key was then placed on the back outside cover of the Bible, and the string was tied around the Bible and the top half of the key. The Bible was then placed in the right hand while two fingers on the left hand held the top part of the key. The following was repeated: "By St. Peter, By St. Paul, By God who made us all." The suspected person's name was then repeated. If the person were guilty of any infraction, the Bible would begin to turn.
>
> (Pyatt & Johns 1999: 47)

The procedure could be used, as here, to detect a thief ("Folklore of the Negroes of Jamaica," 1904: 93). This version was significantly different from the version used in Britain, where the practice was more widespread and, it seems, taken more seriously, even being used legally.

More commonly, the Bible & Key was used to determine the name of a future spouse. For the latter purpose, the words recited were drawn from the story of Ruth:

> In the early years of the twentieth century in rural northern Virginia a frequent feature of children's parties was the telling of amatory fortunes by appeal to a supposedly mystical passage in the Bible. The magic words were found in Ruth 1:6: ". . . Intreat me not to leave thee or return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God. . ."
>
> Managed by a juvenile fortuneteller with enough Sunday school instruction to find it in the Bible, this occult verse could quickly distinguish between a pair of prepuberty lovers who were merely infatuated and a couple of seven-year-old soulmates whose love would be eternal. The process was as follows. The fortuneteller would insert an old-fashioned door key between the pages of the Bible, with the pin and bit end marking Ruth's famous sentiment. The bow end of the key with a couple of inches of stem was left protruding. The Bible was then bound tightly with a piece of string so the key would not pull out. The lovers whose future affection was to be foretold faced each other with the forefingers of their little right hands extended. The head of the key was placed on their forefingers with the stem extending downward between them and the Bible dangling beneath. The fortuneteller would then intone the magic verse: "Intreat me not to leave thee . . . for whither thou goest I will go and where thou lodgest I will lodge . . ."

> If during the incantation the head of the key remained stationary on the fingertips with the Bible suspended beneath, this couple was not deathlessly devoted but merely temporarily enamoured. On the other hand if the Bible moved and the head of the key turned until it slipped off and fell to the floor, it demonstrated unmeasurable depths of devotion. Here was a pair of star-crossed lovers whose fidelity would endure from alpha to omega. This raconteur still holds a vivid memory of himself as a second grader, standing before the fortuneteller with his beloved Beulah (her surname is unrecallable) and seeing the little Bible plunk to the floor.
>
> It should be recorded that the key turned and the Bible dropped at least ninety percent of the time. An elderly cynic might conclude that this was motivated less by depths of immortal passion than by an understandable excitement in little fingertips and the jostling of other lovers waiting their turn with the fortuneteller. At any rate there developed an amazing discrepancy between the amount of eternal love forecast by this device and the divorce statistics recorded later in the century.
>
> (Flory 1969: 71)

The Bible & Key was practiced in many small variants (Browne 1958, nos. 2988–89; Hand 1961, nos. 4344–46; Hyatt 1965, no. 9408; Puckett 1981, nos. 13388–89, 24826; Randolph 1947: 173). A major variant, described by the Philadelphia Inquirer ("Lovers' lore," 1912), used a verse from Proverbs: "Better is the dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." The article notes that the key really does turn in the Bible, and suggests "human magnetism" as the explanation. Interestingly, in 1900 the New Haven Register reported use of the Bible & Key—unsuccessfully—to find a missing body ("Tried a charm: Used Bible and Key to find dead body," 1900).

The Bible & Key was featured in a peculiar story involving the father of the famous statesman Daniel Webster:

> A neighbor of Mr. Webster missed on a time $100 from his oaken desk, and though he suspected a respectable farmer he dared not accuse him for want of proof. Stating his case to Mr. Webster—he drew down his heavy eyebrows for a moment, and then said: "Ask him to meet you and myself and some others at my brother William's house tonight." When all were assembled Mr. Webster poised a Bible upon a stick, the ends of which rested upon two chairs, and on the Bible he placed a key. He then began by calling upon his brother thus: "William Webster, be it he. Turn Bible! Turn Key!" And so proceeded to the names of others, but Bible and key did not hear, and there was no turning. At length he came to the name of the suspected thief, and fixing his piercing black eyes upon him, cried out: "Eliphalet T., be it he. Turn Bible! Turn Key!" At once by some mysterious jog which the spiritual rappers could hardly excel,

down let both Bible and key—and the suspected confessed his crime and restored the stolen money.

("Judge Webster's sharp practice with a thief," 1862)

OTHER ROMANTIC DIVINATIONS

Two final forms of romantic divination were as follows:

Before you go to bed at night; get the Bible, select a chapter that has as many verses as your sweetheart is years old, memorize the last one, repeat it two or three times, put the Bible under your pillow, and go to sleep. If you dream of the person, you will marry him or her, as the case may be.

(Thomas & Thomas 1920, no. 226)

If you want to know if your sweetheart loves you, read the Bible nine nights and on the ninth night, open it at random and you will see his picture if he loves you.

(Browne 1958, no. 2932; cf. also no. 2954)

This concludes our survey of Bible magic and divination.

CONCLUSION

Faced with these traditions, the most fundamental question would seem to be why people would think that Bibles or Bible texts would be efficacious for fending off nightmares or witches or diseases. How does such an idea gain credibility? What caused a person, upon hearing such lore, to take it seriously enough to pass it on, at least to the folklore collector, and at least sometimes to put it into practice?

We do well to remember that belief—in the sense of credibility—is not a binary affair. Vance Randolph, reporting on traditions in the Ozark Mountains, describes the attitude that prevails in the first-louse practice:

Another semi-serious ceremony occurs when the first louse is found on a boy baby's head. This is quite an occasion in some families, and the other children all gather round while the mother kills the louse by "popping" it on the family Bible. While doing this she intones a wish about the children's future profession and salutes him as lawyer, doctor, merchant, farmer, preacher or what-not. This ritual is not exactly a joke—children are not allowed to laugh at anything in which the Bible

> is concerned—but I do not think many adults really believe that the child's future is determined by "louse poppin'."
>
> (Randolph 1947: 336)

It is striking that it was the use of the Bible that gave the ceremony what seriousness it had, but that despite use of the Bible, it bordered on a joke. Similarly, the romantic version of the Bible & Key was used at children's parties, a fact that likely accounts for its wide attestation and its many variants (Flory 1969: 71).

Moreover, there is evidence that the use of Bible magic or divination was regarded as foolish, a manifestation of irrational superstition:

> One time a man comes around here with a Bible. He put a key in it and says to me "Make a wish and if this here Bible turns over when you turn that key you sure gonna git your wish." Well, he takes one end of the key and I takes the other. He was sure trying to make that Bible turn over, but I held it so tight he couldn't do it. I knows I don't believe in nothin' like that.
>
> (Saxon et al. 1945: 391–92)

US newspapers treated serious use, in England, of the Bible & Key for identifying thieves as an example of backwardness and superstition ("Bible & Key," 1879; "Extracts," 1832; "Singular ignorance," 1840; "Singular superstitions," 1868). Another report indicates a reluctance to resort to Bible magic:

> An old man in Joplin, Missouri, told me that perhaps "all that Bible stuff" was necessary to stop serious hemorrhage, as when somebody had cut his throat, but an ordinary nosebleed could easily be "chipped off" without any religious monkey business. You just catch a number of drops of the blood on a chip—one drop for each year of the patient's life. Put the chip with the blood on it in a dry, safe place—on a high rafter, for example, or seal it up in a dry glass jar. As long as the chip is not disturbed, the nose will not bleed.
>
> (Randolph 1947: 124)

In this report the informant calls Bible magic "religious monkey business"—but does not deny that it works. Yet even those who did practice it recognized its limitations:

> A woman at West Plains, Missouri, places her right hand on the closed Bible, makes a wish, and opens the book at random. She does this three times, muttering the same wish under her breath. If the opened Bible shows the words "it came to pass" three times in succession, she is sure to get her wish. This woman tells me that she has been doing this

> for many years, and that perhaps 90 percent of her prayers have been granted. "Of course," she told me smiling, "a body shouldn't wish for somethin' that aint *reasonable*."
>
> (Randolph 1947: 12)

Thus Bible magic was regarded with varying degrees of seriousness, in the vague attitudinal territory between whimsy and conviction.

Yet why were they taken seriously at all? The variety of magical and divinatory traditions represented here all attest to a pervasive yet ill-defined sense that the Bible had special efficacy. In artifactual uses, the language of the report often suggests that the Bible or amulet was conceptualized as efficacious in its own right:

> A patient who had tuberculosis said he kept a copy of the Lord's Prayer pasted to his chest and that *it was curing his disease.*
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 11925, emphasis added)

> Copies of the ninety-first Psalm pinned over the heart will protect the heart from being struck.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 20726b)

This attribution of agency to the Bible is also clear in the many testimonies in which the placement of a Bible in a home or under one's pillow was thought to have ongoing effects. The Bible, in its artifactual form, was thus treated as a means by which a person could produce effects that could not be obtained by other means. Yet the precise set of effects for which the Bible could be used were often vaguely defined—e.g., "good luck"—and was also a point at which traditions were most likely to vary. From this perspective the warnings against maltreatment of a Bible make sense. One must be careful how one treats the Bible because one never knows what the consequences might be—hence the warnings are phrased in terms of generic "bad luck."

A few reports described ways in which particular individuals—all regular practitioners—attributed the Bible's efficacy to God's intervention:

> Mrs. Callie Brake, Seymour, Missouri, used the same verse, adding: "You call the person by name and the wound by name and walk toward the sunrise repeating God's Word and the bleeding will stop. My daddy always kept that chapter at hand so he could find it right quick. He would read it if we cut ourselves dangerously and the great God of Israel would stop the bleeding. There is no 'charm' about this stopping blood, it is God's own words."
>
> (Randolph 1947: 122–23)

> Jocie Armentrout of Randolph County drew a line for me where she believed Christianity ended and occult belief began. Regarding the

> fairly common practice of "stopping blood" . . . she thought God was invoked in the healing of a bleeding person through the Bible verse that is recited.
>
> (Milnes 2007: 17)

> Sister Erma Allen once told me of having healed a small boy who had cut his head; she had silently said the verse [Ezekiel 16:6] over and over while at the same time applying ice to the wound. How did she know that it was not the ice that had stopped the bleeding, I asked? After a pause she reprimanded me gently with, "God sewed it with His needle, darlin'."
>
> (Snow 1993: 55)

These reports were rare and stood in marked contrast to the majority, which made no reference to God at all, but they indicate that at least some people—particularly those who were both practitioners of Bible magic and self-identified Christians—perceived a tension between treating the Bible as an efficacious agent and attributing all miraculous healings to God.

In earlier works I have argued that the notion that the Bible-as-artifact is efficacious stems from the observation that the Bible-as-text is powerful (Malley 2004, 2006). The observation that the Bible-as-text is powerful comes predominantly from the role of the Bible in socially authorized discourse: a variety of authoritative statements are said to be authoritative because they are derived from the Bible, and this creates the impression that the Bible is a powerful text. The translation of this intuition from the text to the artifact is more difficult to explain but is probably best understood as a combination of two factors.

First is ritual treatment of the Bible-as-artifact in ecclesiastical contexts. When preachers hold up, gesture with, and sometimes even thump Bibles, children gather that there is something special about this object, even if they are not sure quite what. This sense is reinforced if children are taught to treat the Bible as an artifact with respect.

Second is conceptual bleeding between closely related concepts. In human thought, conceptual properties have a tendency to spill over from one concept to another, particularly if those two concepts are closely related. This tendency to semantic "slippage" has been widely observed by anthropologists and is probably to be explained by network models of human memory (Malley & Knight 2008). The Bible-as-text and the Bible-as-artifact are probably two dimensions of the same concept, and so it is not surprising that there is a significant amount of inferential crossover between them (Malley 2004: chapter 2).

Thus, in a cultural environment where the Bible is explicitly involved in authoritative discourse, there develops a propensity for people to develop the intuitions required for magical practices involving the Bible as artifact. In my ethnographic work, I was able to document the presence of these

intuitions as a by-product of normal Biblicist practices in church contexts. Magical practices thus find these intuitions already available, fertile soil in which they can gain credibility.

The origin of biblical efficacy in interpretive discourse may explain why some reports indicate that the Bible should be opened, even if no one is reading it:

> Just before going into a new house, open a Bible and lay it on the front doorstep; then pick up the Bible and enter the house. You will be lucky in that house.
>
> (Hyatt 1965, no. 11298)

> To have the Bible open in the house is good luck.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 24811)

> A headache can be cured, or at least helped, if a Bible opened to the 23rd Psalm is placed on the head.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 9981)

> In a severe storm, open the Bible and turn it toward the direction the storm is coming, and the storm will abate.
>
> (Puckett et al. 1981, no. 35094)

Opening a Bible at least calls attention to its textual content, and if my hypothesis is correct, its textual content is perceived as relevant to the magical practice even if the practitioners are not sure why it would be.

The connection between the use of the Bible in discourse and its performative use is patent also in the use of semantically relevant passages for cures. Considered in the abstract, there is no obvious reason why Ezekiel 16:6 would have any greater effect in stopping blood than any other verse in the Bible. Yet clearly it was selected for its semantic relevance to the problem at hand: the verse, when interpreted, combines a reference to bleeding with an injunction to survive it. Similarly, most of the performative uses of the text deploy a text with a contextually relevant meaning to achieve a magical—that is, nonsemantic—effect.

If my hypothesis is correct, then it is the interpretive practice that gives rise to the intuitions exploited in our closing report, an apocryphal story involving the father of the famous statesman Daniel Webster ("Judge Webster's sharp practice with a thief," 1862):

> A neighbor of Mr. Webster missed on a time $100 from his oaken desk, and though he suspected a respectable farmer he dared not accuse him for want of proof. Stating his case to Mr. Webster—he drew down his heavy eyebrows for a moment, and then said: "Ask him to meet you and myself and some others at my brother William's house tonight."

When all were assembled Mr. Webster poised a Bible upon a stick, the ends of which rested upon two chairs, and on the Bible he placed a key. He then began by calling upon his brother thus.
"William Webster, be it he, Turn Bible! Turn Key!"

And so proceeded to the names of others, but Bible and key did not hear, and there was no turning. At length he came to the name of the suspected thief, and fixing his piercing black eyes upon him, cried out:
"Eliphalet T., be it he, Turn Bible! Turn Key!"

At once by some mysterious jog which the spiritual rappers could hardly excel, down let both Bible and key—and the suspected confessed his crime and restored the stolen money.

NOTES

1 My deepest thanks to Anwar Smidi, Samantha Malley, Meredith Malley, and especially Drake Misek for their assistance with the research for this article. Errors are, of course, my responsibility alone.

2 In this tradition and a few others, the word *Bible* appears as *bible*. I was unable to discern any significance to this, especially as the traditions were transmitted orally, so I have rendered the handful of such occurrences as proper nouns. I have done the same with the word *psalm* where it seems clear that the biblical *book of Psalms* is intended.

3 I felt a certain satisfaction upon discovering this tradition because years ago I suggested, on the basis of my analysis of the Bible concept, that the conceptual representation of the Bible made it susceptible to a tradition like this (Malley 2004: 71). Even so, a tradition of this form was never particularly *im*plausible, so it was not really a *surprising* prediction.

4 Browne (1958, no. 495) reports the use of Ecclesiastes 7:16 to stop blood. I suspect that this was originally a reference to Ezekiel that has somehow become distorted, but if so, it was distorted when Browne collected it because Browne also reports the use of Ezekiel 16:6.

5 It is possible that the informant here, though he refers to "words of the Bible," is thinking of the invocation of the Trinity. There are several traditions similar to the following (Puckett 1981, no. 29768):
If you ask a ghost, "In the name: of the Father, or Son, or Holy Ghost what are you doing here?" and if the ghost is not in human form, it will leave. If it is in the form of a person, it will tell you what it wants.

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