As the success of the Harry Potter universe has shown us, magic can be both an enchanting escape from reality and a terrifying dark corner of the unknown. In this class, we’ll start with the ancient roots of magic, reading some Egyptian and Mesopotamian spells and one of the most popular grimoires (spell books) in Renaissance Europe. Then, we’ll dig into several claims about magic, exploring each through close reading and reflection:

- That “magic” is any religious belief or practice not sanctioned by those in power.
- That our personal thoughts can influence the external world (called “magical thinking”).
- That “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” –Clarke’s third law
- That rituals are useful in making sense of the world (so a little bit of magic might be a good thing!)

**Add some magic to your fall 2021 life!** We’ll be reading:

- A selection of ancient Near Eastern spells in translation (2nd – 1st millennium BC)
- The Gospel of Mark (1st century AD)
- The Key of Solomon (14th century)
- Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1623)
- *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* by Mark Twain (1889)
- *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (1972)