

Call for Papers: Seminar on Magic, Monstrosity, and the Natural World in the Early Modern Period

In early modern Europe, new philosophical trends and novel technologies increasingly influenced people's understanding and uses of the natural world. Yet, magic still flourished, deeply rooted in everyday beliefs about that world. This seminar invites papers exploring the intersection of magical beliefs and practices (elite and common), technological advancements, and emerging modes of inquiry, focusing on their implications for understanding the natural world we inhabit.

This year, we are particularly interested in how early modern plays and cultural artefacts invoke “weirdness” in encounters with wilderness and the natural world. Do weird phenomena in literature and performance reveal an uncanny overlap between life's natural, supernatural, and preternatural dimensions and the world? Have modern critical approaches to literary ecology made us too familiar with the natural world, obscuring the strangeness and mystery it held in the early modern imagination? Can “re-weirding”—in both criticism and performance—help recapture early modern senses of the demonic, fated, magical, spiritual, and “wild” forces beyond human control?

This seminar also aligns with this year's broad theme of *Monstrosity*. We welcome papers addressing monstrous bodies, monstrous conceptions of the feminine or masculine, or monstrous environments, and those interrogating the broader concept of monstrosity in relation to magic, technology, and the natural world. While the theme of monstrosity is a focal point, speakers are encouraged to interact with it as much or as little as suits their approach.

Topics might include but are not limited to:

- The role of magic and alchemy in shaping early modern conceptions of nature and the cosmos.
- Representations of weirdness, wilderness, and the supernatural in early modern drama and literature.
- Monstrous bodies and identities as sites of wonder, fear, or transgression.
- The interplay between emerging scientific inquiries and magical worldviews.
- How performance practices can re-engage with the strangeness of the early modern world.
- The influence of gendered conceptions of monstrosity on perceptions of nature and the human.

We encourage submissions from various disciplinary perspectives, including literature, history, theatre, philosophy, and environmental humanities. Please submit abstracts of up to 300 words and a brief bio to yorkcabinetofcuriosities@gmail.com by March 3rd. Selected participants will be notified shortly after.