



Conference

The Natural and the Supernatural in Medieval and Early Modern Worlds

Perth Medieval and Renaissance Group & UWA Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies Annual Conference

Date: 7 October 2017
Venue: The University of Western Australia
Abstract Deadline: 31 July 2017
Enquiries: pmrg.cmems.conference2017@gmail.com

Today, the natural and the supernatural are often viewed in stark opposition. In the medieval and early modern period, however, the supernatural infused every aspect of daily life. Prayers and rites punctuated everyday routines, and natural phenomena – such as earthquakes and eclipses – were often viewed with both suspicion and wonder or as divine portents. Miracle stories, rumours of witchcraft, and accounts of relic veneration all indicate that magic shaped medieval and early modern imaginations. The early modern period was also an era of European exploration, invasion and colonisation, which saw the increase of scientific knowledge through encounters with a number of societies around the globe. Natural histories, travel narratives, and objects circulated widely, creating new connections and shaping existing belief systems. As these sources demonstrate, however, persecution also abounded, and was often prompted by perceived differences in culture or beliefs about the (super)natural.

This conference will examine the numerous and various intersections of the natural and the supernatural. What qualified as natural and supernatural in diverse medieval and early modern societies? When

was the world categorised in terms of a natural/supernatural binary? When was this not the case? How did people in medieval and early modern societies perceive and experience these phenomena? How and why did beliefs and structures based on understandings of the natural and the supernatural change in this period? What prompted persecution? How are these events represented and experienced through heritage today?

The conference organisers invite proposals for 20-minute papers on the following (or related) themes:

- Witchcraft, magic, superstition
- Miracle stories: belief, doubt, and civic pride
- Religious Reformations; religious change
- Understandings of nature and natural law
- Travel, exploration, and natural history
- Ghosts, fairies, spirits
- Relics, charms, and objects believed to harness supernatural power
- Sacred landscapes, journeys, and practices
- Cross-cultural understandings of the natural and the supernatural
- Heritage sites and the supernatural
- Crossing or breaking boundaries, lived and imaginary
- The natural and the supernatural in medieval and early modern literature or performance
- Modern recollections of medieval and early modern (super)natural history

Please send a paper title, 250-word abstract and a short (no more than 100-word) biography to pmrg.cmems.conference2017@gmail.com by 31 July 2017.