

**'The Natural and the Supernatural in Medieval and Early Modern Worlds': UWA Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies & Perth Medieval and Renaissance Group Conference**

**Abstracts and Speaker Bios**

**Negotiating Natural and Supernatural: The Ambiguous Approach of Erasmus  
Kirk Essary**

The Renaissance witnessed rapidly shifting understandings of and attitudes towards the natural and supernatural. Erasmus of Rotterdam was not the only Christian humanist who mined ancient works on the natural world, such as Pliny's *Natural History*, while simultaneously arguing that philosophers' attempts to uncover the secrets of nature are ultimately foolish when compared with 'true wisdom' as revealed in Scripture. This paper will consider some of the ways in which this tension plays out in Erasmus' works, and will attempt to discern how Erasmus understood the distinction between the natural and supernatural.

Kirk Essary is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the ARC Centre for the History of Emotions at The University of Western Australia. He holds an MA in Classics from Texas Tech University (2008), an MA in Religions of Western Antiquity from Florida State University (2010), and a PhD in Religion from Florida State University (2014). He works primarily on Erasmus and John Calvin, analysing their understanding of emotions in the larger context of the Renaissance and Reformation reception of classical, biblical, and patristic ideas. He is also interested in the role of emotion and affectivity in the history of rhetoric, in sermons and preaching manuals, and in the theological discourse of early modern biblical humanists. His first book, *Erasmus and Calvin on the Foolishness of God: Reason and Emotion in the Christian Philosophy* (University of Toronto Press, 2017), examines the role of Pauline folly in the conceptions of the "Christian philosophy" in the works of Erasmus and John Calvin, with an eye to Erasmus' influence on the sixteenth-century Protestant exegetical tradition.

**Muhammad's Miracles: Science, Faith, and the Prophet's Tricks in Medieval East Norse Texts  
Jonathan Adams**

In this paper, I shall talk about the lives of the Prophet Muhammad found in vernacular saints' lives (*Old Swedish Legendary*), devotional works (*Consolation of the Soul*), and travel descriptions (*John Mandeville*) from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Denmark and Sweden. The paper will focus on stories about how Muhammad deceived people into believing that he was a Prophet using tricks, natural phenomena, and his alleged medical condition: trained animals to appear to worship him, used magnets to create a floating coffin, and epilepsy to give the impression of divine ecstasy.

These lives of Muhammad are adaptations of works in Latin and German, while their presentation of Muhammad as a false prophet is traceable to Byzantine polemical authors, such as John of Damascus. The East Norse portrayal of Muhammad as a trickster owes a debt of gratitude to Gautier de Compiègne's *Otia de Machometi* (before 1150). However, rather than

the East Norse lives of Muhammad being free-standing works, they are found as integrated sections in collections of devotional and didactic works aimed at teaching and nurturing Christian piety in their readers. This is perhaps an unexpected textual context: why, for example, would a false Prophet be found in a collection of Christian saints' lives? When the Qur'ān attributes no miracles to the Muhammad whatsoever, what is the reason for these Christian writers to do so and then to set about exposing them as false? Hermeneutical argumentation and strawman-polemics are key to understanding the purpose of "Muhammad's miracles" among a readership that had little, if any, chance of ever coming into contact with Islam.

Jonathan Adams is a researcher in the Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University, and senior editor at *Diplomatarium Danicum*, the Society for Danish Language and Literature in Copenhagen. His research focuses on medieval East Norse philology, Birgittine literature, and the history of antisemitism in Scandinavia. Recent books include *Revealing the Secrets of the Jews* (de Gruyter, 2017) and *Fear and Loathing in the North* (de Gruyter, 2015), both co-edited with Cordelia Heß; *Østnordisk filologi* (Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2015); *The Revelations of St Birgitta* (Brill, 2015); and *The Jewish-Christian Encounter in Medieval Preaching* (Routledge, 2014), co-edited with Jussi Hanska. He is co-editor of *Medieval Sermon Studies*.

### **Curiosity that Becomes Something Else: The Desire to See and to Speak with the Dead in English Twelfth-Century Sources**

**Michael D. Barbezat**

This paper examines the desire to see the supernatural within the context of the affective lives of twelfth-century religious men. It examines how a curiosity for empirical knowledge regarding the supernatural world participated in the cultivation of an affective connection with the divine that transcended the limitations upon natural human knowledge. In these sources, an initial curiosity is transformed, or rather is converted, into an emotional type of knowledge.

The twelfth-century parish priest, William of Lessness, made a habit of asking dying men to return from the dead and speak to him. His friend, Peter of Cornwall, recorded that he made three such agreements, two with Augustinian canons and one with a young servant. He did this out of a kind of curiosity about the usually invisible spiritual world. He wanted to know its details, and he wanted to see the soul made manifest. In his retelling, Peter stressed that as William matured his curiosity, his desire to see, changed into something else. What began as an empirical curiosity ended as an emotional connection productive of a more profound and lasting type of knowledge. For twelfth-century Latin writers, this conversion of desire was the logical and positive result of transformative encounters with the dead.

Michael Barbezat is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions at The University of Western Australia. He holds an MA in Medieval History from the University of California at Davis (2006) and a PhD in Medieval Studies from the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto (2013). His research focuses generally on connections between religious ideologies and conceptions of society, geography and identity,

particularly in the fields of medieval historiography and literature, and his current project, 'Burning Bodies: Community, Eschatology and Identity in the Middle Ages', explores the role played by ideas of punishment in Hell and Purgatory in medieval ideas of community, identity and deviance.

### **Shakespeare's Political Spectres**

**Victoria Bladen**

In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, ghosts were problematic, a concept associated with Catholic constructions of the afterlife and with folkloric traditions that Protestant ideology sought to displace. However, ghosts proved popular on the stage and Shakespeare was highly attuned to the theatrical power of the spectral. In Shakespeare's plays, the throne is a particularly haunted space. In *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, political leaders are subject to visitations from ghosts who held power themselves or who were murdered as part of the brutal process of obtaining political power. Ghosts are not only inherently unsettling, rendering nebulous the boundary between the living and the dead. They implicitly question monarchs' positions, undermine assumptions of legitimacy and question the authenticity of those wielding political power. They also potentially question whole political systems and modes of power. Pursuant to the theory of the king's two bodies, the spirit, the essence of divine kingship, passed seamlessly to the next legitimate ruler. However in cases of rupture, the spirit of 'authentic' monarchy could be left disembodied, not re-vested in a new body, thus constituting a spectral presence displaced from the political body. Shakespeare was intensely interested in such cases of rupture, scenarios where power had not passed legitimately, leaving unresolved the question of where 'legitimate' right was vested. This paper explores Shakespeare's political spectres in these four plays, examining how and to what end these spectral figures haunt political spaces, and how they resonate with the additional spectre, the second ghost, of the disembodied legitimate ruler.

Victoria Bladen teaches in literary studies, adaptation and poetics at The University of Queensland. She has published four Shakespearean text guides in the Insight Publications (Melbourne) series: *Measure for Measure* (2015), *Henry IV Part 1* (2012), *Julius Caesar* (2011), and *Romeo and Juliet* (2010). She co-edited *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England* (Ashgate, 2015) and *Shakespeare on Screen: Macbeth* (Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2013). Victoria has published articles in several volumes of the *Shakespeare on Screen* series, and is co-editing *Shakespeare and the Supernatural* (forthcoming with Manchester University Press).

### **Trouble at Sea: Travelling to the New World and Witchcraft Accusations**

**Judith Bonzol**

In the 1650s several women were accused of witchcraft whilst on board ships travelling to the New World. Three women were hanged on their way to the English colonies in Chesapeake Bay, whilst two women, Elizabeth Page and Jane Hopkins, were identified as witches by fellow passengers on board the *Mayflower* on their way to Bermuda in 1654. This paper focuses on

the Bermuda cases. These were unusual because the accused women were of higher status than was typical in witchcraft prosecutions. They were thought to have caused neither injury, illness, or death to their fellow passengers and yet were regarded as a threat to the safety of the ship and all on board. The supernatural manifestations that led to the women being charged with witchcraft shortly after landing in Bermuda at the bequest of the ship's captain were distinctly nautical, particularly Elizabeth Page's. She had reportedly interfered with the ship's navigation, making the ship's compass spin back and forth without touching it. Jane Hopkins, on the other hand, had a suspicious mark on her shoulder, allegedly found a missing bottle belonging to Elizabeth Page, and conjured a rat. I will consider the background to witchcraft accusations on Bermuda and the religious and political discord extending from England to the New World, and examine the extent to which seafarers' tales that witches could manipulate the weather and conjure storms contributed to the accusations against these women.

Judith Bonzol is an Honorary Research Associate in History at The University of Sydney, where she was awarded her PhD on cunning folk and supernatural illness in early modern England in 2011. She has published several journal articles and book chapters on demonic possession, witchcraft, medicine, and cunning folk in the early modern period, including 'The Medical Diagnosis of Demonic Possession in an Early Modern English Community', *Parergon* 26 (2009). Forthcoming is a chapter on demonic possession in early seventeenth-century Bermuda in a Routledge collection, *Monsters and Borders in the Early Modern Imagination*, edited by Hans Broedel.

### **Aligning Natural and Supernatural Arousal**

**Clare Davidson**

The *Cloud of Unknowing* forebodingly warns that young disciples who hear that they should feel desire for loving Christ may, 'in a curioustie of witte...conceyve thees wordes not goostly, as thei ben ment, bot fleschly and bodily' (ll. 1591–92). This misunderstanding makes them 'enflaumid with an unkyndely hete of compleccion, causid of misrewlyng of theire bodies' (ll. 1601–03). Attributing feelings of intense arousal to the effects of a 'misruled', reproduction-orientated body is likewise the premise of modern interpretations of medieval accounts of arousal in a religious context that diagnose such feelings to the pathological repression of sexual urges. This kind of ethical differentiation between a kind of medieval desire that was temporal and earthly and one that was spiritual and incorporeal has shaped a variety of modern and historical responses to expressions of arousal. An alternative theory of desire attributes experiences of supernatural arousal to the same faculties and feelings of the body as natural experiences, necessitating a reconsideration of this binary distinction and its ethical relevance to sanctioning desire.

Clare Davidson is an Associate of the Perth node of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, and a sessional lecturer in English and Cultural Studies at The University of Western Australia. She completed her PhD, which focused on the rhetoric of physiological and mental arousal in fourteenth-century Middle English literature, at The University of Western

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Australia in 2017. Her current research continues to explore sensory human experience particularly through the lens of aesthetics, reading practices and the history of the body.

### **Shifting Feminine Gender Roles in Vampiric Mythology and Gothic Literature**

**Jessica Donovan**

Myths and legends are used as cautionary tales to underpin the attitudes and actions of society. Vampire mythologies and gothic literature reinforce traditional gender stereotypes upon women by associating unfeminine behaviour with failure and corruption of the soul. Women evolve from the perpetrator in vampire myths; to the willing victim in classical vampire literature; to the reluctant hero in modern vampire literature. This paper will investigate how vampiric mythology underscores patriarchal anxieties about the association between women and power, how Gothic literature functions as a warning against the perversion of feminine bodies and how vampirism is used as society's punishment for immoral, wanton women. Vampire myths condemn women who fail in their maternal duties in life to eternal damnation in death to prey on those they would have protected in life. Classic gothic literature portrays women as promiscuous fools and their perceived wantonness is punished with the corruption of their soul. Only their male family members can save them from damnation. Twentieth-century gothic literature offers a heroine in the form of a slayer, shackled to her solitary duty. However, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* narrative eventually rejects this expected servitude and throws off the imposed constraints, reclaiming control without foregoing any power. When women deviate from traditional gender roles and exert free will, they are deemed 'unfeminine'. Patriarchal societies that are threatened by women who display this unseemly behaviour would see them punished with the degeneracy of their immortal soul, which is constantly deemed more important than their life.

Jessica Donovan is a recent graduate in Information Management at Curtin University, for which she completed a thesis entitled 'Curtin community's perceptions of the concept of compliance' under the supervision of Dr Pauline Joseph. In 2012, she graduated with a Masters in Medieval and Early Modern studies from The University of Western Australia. Her thesis was titled 'Heavy is the Head that Wears the Crown: Contemporary Reputations and Historical Representations of Queens Regent' and supervised by professors Philippa Maddern and Susan Broomhall.

### **Bird Imagery in the *Ancrene Wisse*: Lessons in Asceticism for the anchoress**

**Jane Victoria Frost**

This paper focuses on the captivating imagery of birds presented in Part III, 'The Inner Feelings', of the *Ancrene Wisse*, a remarkable early thirteenth-century Middle English guide for anchoresses. It will examine how the author utilises bird imagery in order to lay out an ascetic program for achieving contemplative union with Christ through penance, prayer, and affective meditation on Christ's Passion. The author capitalizes on his audience's prior knowledge of the distinctive behaviour of birds to demonstrate to his readers the less familiar abstract elements of the ascetic life in the anchorhold. In order to delineate the essential qualities and practices

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comprising an anchoress's ascetic program, particular attention will be paid to the manner in which the author describes the natural behaviours and characteristics of birds. I propose that the author's keen insight into the particularly harsh and ambitious nature of the anchoress's spirituality is evident in the way that he innovatively uses bird imagery to teach and inspire the anchoress to strive after a life of perfection lived through the ascetic ideal.

Jane Victoria Frost is completing an Honours degree in Medieval and Early Modern Studies at The University of Western Australia. Her dissertation examines literary representations of birds in medieval England.

### **Divine Encounters: The Rituals and Miracles of Fifteenth-Century Tuscan Images** **Shannon Gilmore**

In the last decades of the fifteenth century, the Florentine countryside witnessed a proliferation of popular cults surrounding miracle-working frescoes of the *Madonna and Child*. My research situates itself within these types of religious events and examines how concrete, material expressions of piety allowed the devotees to independently forge a pathway to the supernatural. This paper attempts to reconstruct the devotees' original experience at the shrines of the miraculous images; drawing on Edward Casey's theory of place, I argue that the clutter of ritual objects and the mass of pilgrims' bodies worked to transform the cultic sites into embodied places and to fix the Virgin's presence in the images. At the sanctuaries, the heat of bodies, the thousands of flickering candles, the rancid potpourri of smells, and the cacophony of sounds all induced visions of the divine and at times even allowed the painted figures in the images to cross into the same physical space occupied by the devotees. Furthermore, through a consideration of the meditative arts, I argue that the miraculous images' iconography and compositional components encouraged the viewers to emotionally and somatically empathise with the depicted figures, dissolving the line between subject and object. The paper will contribute to a better understanding of the development of the lay religious movement in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and in particular will highlight the ways in which miraculous images provided the laity with a direct line of communication to the divine without the mediation of the clergy.

Shannon Gilmore is a PhD Candidate in the History of Art and Architecture Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She holds an MA in Art History from Syracuse University, having been selected as a fellow in the Florence, Italy program. Her research currently focuses on Renaissance devotional painting in Central Italy, with a particular emphasis on theories of place and ritual. She has presented at two Renaissance Society of America Conferences and her essay, 'Ritually Reconstructing Calvary: Sacred Space and Gender at the House of Mary in Ephesus', has been accepted for publication in an edited volume.

### **Matter, Mother, Nature: Staging Magic and Mastery in Action** **Adam Hembree**

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Jacques's world is a stage in *As You Like It*, but John Webster's stage is a world in 'An Excellent Actor': 'Sit in a full theatre, and you will think you see so many lines drawn from the circumference of so many ears, while the *Actor* is the *centre*' (M6, Webster's emphasis). Webster's audiences are satellites in the players' orbit, moved and quickened by the spirit of their action. Stage actors summon distant times and lands with their words, shaping a 'humble O' into the 'vast fields of France' (*Henry V* 1.1.12-13). That same breath of life also begs pardon for shadows that have offended, for imperfect visions, and for weak and idle themes. My paper parallels theatrical creation to familiar near-eastern cosmogonies: the Father's word enlivens inert, feminised, corruptible matter, birthing creation. In creating new worlds—and recreating past worlds—players test the logic of creation, problematizing the gendered divide between matter and form, *mimesis* and *poesis*. Staging witchcraft casts this problem into relief. The witch is a natural body and a vessel for supernatural power, both a malicious agent and an unfortunate victim. *Macbeth's* witches, however, deny us the personal agency afforded by other witchcraft plays like *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) or *Mother Bombie* (1594). What Puck's *Midsummer* epilogue suggests, the witches perform. They are shadows, and they make dreams. I argue that *Macbeth's* witches purge the common narrative of masculine mastery over Mother Nature by collapsing the transcendent into the material, substance into shadow.

Adam is a PhD candidate in English and Theatre Studies at The University of Melbourne and the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions. His thesis research examines the discursive parallels between early modern English stage action and the magical or occult arts. Other critical interests include the philosophy of language, etymology, affect theory, constructions of evil, and the intersections of performance studies with gender/queer theory and ecocriticism. Adam also performs and teaches improvisational theatre, and is a co-founder of *Soothplayers: Completely Improvised Shakespeare*.

**The “enfant prodige”: Saint Rose of Viterbo (1233–1251) as a Medium of Supernatural between the Middle Ages and the Contemporary Era**  
**Sarah Tiboni**

This paper reflects on the extraordinary figure of the penitent Rose of Viterbo, underlining the devotional heritage that this saint has delivered to our age. The holiness of Rose is strongly connected to the supernatural: she was a miracle in herself, in fact she lived until the age of eighteen even when affected by the mortal pathology of sternum's agenesis; she was a visionary and a prophetess, in fact her *Vita* attests that she foresaw the death of the emperor Frederick II; and a lot of miracles are attested to before and after her death. A case study of Saint Rose is of great interest. Thanks to rich and varied unpublished sources (e.g. *Vitae*, process of canonisation, relics, ex-voto, etc), it is possible to understand the reception of the supernatural both at the level of civil and ecclesiastical institutions and the common people.

This paper will examine the cultural and devotional heritage of Rose by considering its traces in the annual procession that takes place in Viterbo in honour of her, which was established by the Commune of Viterbo in 1512, the mummy of Rose, and the many evidences of miraculously-healed people that testify to her protection and intercession.

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Sarah Tiboni holds a PhD in Historical and Archival Studies from the University of Siena (2016); a Diploma from National training school on editing historical documentary sources, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, Rome (2010); an Archival, Paleography and Diplomatic Diploma from the Archival School of Florence State Archive (2001); and an MA in Archival Studies from the University of Pisa (2001). Her research interests include Italian historical and archival studies, editing of documentary sources, abandoned childhood, ancient hospitals. She is also a Board member of the *Centro Studi Santa Rosa da Viterbo*, an onlus born to study Historical Archive of Saint Rose from Viterbo and to valorize the archival studies in general.

### **“A frightening new report”: Fear, Blasphemers, and the Devil in Early Modern German News Abaigéal Warfield**

Appeals to fear and threats have long been deemed as effective in constructing convincing arguments that regulate people’s behaviours. In order to effect changes in their audiences’ behaviour, it will be argued, a number of Lutheran authors employed a “fear appeal” approach. This paper will show how stories in early modern Lutheran news worked to enhance the perceived severity of the threat of the Devil, sometimes using scary graphic warnings, which sought to underline the dangerous nature of certain “ungodly” behaviours, especially blasphemy, which was believed to provoke God’s wrath.

A number of Lutheran authors were quick to realise that they could use the new genre of *Neue Zeitungen* to communicate fear laden warnings beyond the pulpit to wider audiences. Frightening stories were used to try to persuade parishioners to abstain from blaspheming and cursing. Blasphemers were graphically portrayed as being tortured by the Devil, with their cursing and swearing leading the Devil directly to their door. By using the threat of the Devil Lutherans sought to regulate human emotions towards the divine, and the diabolical. The examples and graphic warnings made clear that one should never curse in anger, and to curse God or swear to the Devil could have dire consequences. It will be argued that just as fear appeals are used today to enhance the perceived severity of threats, Lutheran news authors similarly employed a fear appeal approach as a means to reform not only behaviours but also to regulate the feelings of members of the Lutheran community.

Abaigéal Warfield is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions at the University of Adelaide. She is co-convenor of the Emotions and Media Research Cluster at the Centre. She is currently working on a project titled “Framing Fear: Constructing Fear of God, the Devil and Witches in Early Modern Germany”. She is in the process of completing her first monograph, which explores how the crime of witchcraft was constructed in German news-reports in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### **The Natural and Supernatural in Early Modern Europe: A Medical Perspective Robert Weston**

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This paper examines the role of the supernatural as opposed to the natural and non-naturals which made up the body of conventional medicine in the early modern period. From the medieval period through the Renaissance, medical practitioners viewed religion and astral influences to be compatible with their traditional models. As the seventeenth century progressed celestial influence was at least partially rejected by the medical 'profession'. Religious considerations of illness were significant in the period; this involved not only the role of God in disease, but also of the Devil. For the population at large, the supernatural was too deeply embedded in popular culture as it applied to health and illness to have disappeared by the end of the early modern period.

Robert Weston is an Honorary Research Fellow at The University of Western Australia. His principal field of research is European medical history in the early modern period. His book, *Medical Consulting by Letter in France, 1665–1789*, was published by Ashgate in 2013; he has also published chapters and journal articles on medical consultations by letter, the history of disease, masculinity, the use of violence in early modern medicine, the history of whooping cough, and the role of emotions in medical practice.