

[Special Journal Issue: The Witch in Medieval and Early Modern Literature](#)

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Call for Publications

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European History / Studies, Literature, Medieval and Byzantine History / Studies, Sexuality Studies, Women's & Gender History / Studies

The Witch in Medieval and Early Modern Literature

In our so-called disenchanted contemporary world, depictions of witches follow rather standard aesthetic and ideological criteria the role of which is to maintain or, on the contrary, to challenge societal considerations regarding gender roles or normative female bodily depictions. But such standardization does not in fact do justice to the heterogeneity of representations that pre-modern witches actually had.

First and foremost, this diversity surfaces when it comes to the various denominations of the pre-modern witch. From the research carried out by Richard Kieckhefer, we know that witches displayed different names corresponding to distinct models of witchcraft. For example, in central Italy the name for witches is *strega* whereas the same figure is simply known as a heretic in the Pays de Vaud and, through contamination, a *vaudoise* in Northern France. Moreover, in discussing the nature of the witch, late medieval and early modern intellectuals – theologians, jurists, doctors, or inquisitors – mobilized different types of knowledge ranging from medicine and folk narratives to scholastic philosophy inspired by Aristotle's natural philosophy and classical literature. In this sense, witches epitomize vast palimpsestic bodies of knowledge conveying theological but also medical and social anxieties about the material presence of demons into the world, their sexual encounters with humans, and individual and collective modes of resisting to acts of witchcraft.

Contemporary scholars of witchcraft based such findings mostly on two types of sources: witchcraft trials dating mainly from the fifteenth century onward and witchcraft treatises.

However, the figure of the witch also entered the imaginary of late-medieval and early-modern literature and its different genres ranging from theater, *débat*

literature, essays, chivalric novels, or didactic and other types of poetry.

This special journal issue welcomes proposals which analyze the variegated representations of witches and witchcraft contained in such literary genres. If witches are essentially the product of certain bodies of knowledge, how do literary productions, some emerging in parallel with witchcraft treatises, use such larger network of knowledge to stage the figure of the witch? What sort of literary and rhetorical mechanisms are included in such “fictional” representations of the witch? Can literary texts be seen as encompassing an apologetic discourse towards the persecutions of witches or, on the contrary, in certain cases, literature became a real “propaganda” machine staging its own rites of exclusion and torture of witches?

Submissions touching one or more of the following approaches and themes are invited:

- The influence of classical literature in shaping representations of witches in medieval and early-modern literature.
- A taxonomy of “literary” witches.
- Different rhetorical and literary techniques used to portray witches.
- A comparative approach among witches in different literary traditions.
- Witches and emotions.
- Theological and medical echoes in the depictions of witches in medieval and early modern literature.
- The witch and the senses.
- Stigmatization and marginalization of witches.
- Literary defenses of witches.

Please submit a 300-word abstract, accompanied by a short academic bio, to andreea.marculescu@ou.edu by February 15, 2020. Notification about acceptance by March 15, 2020 and submission of 7,500-8,000 word article without notes by October 30, 2020. Submissions can be made both in French and English. The journal *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* expressed interest in dedicating a special issue to this topic but ultimately the papers might be published in an equally or higher ranked journal.

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