

The Indiana Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies announces its twenty-second annual
Bloomington Spring Workshop (May 16-18, 2024)

The Magical Eighteenth Century

Conjured into existence by the words “Enlightenment” and “reason,” the field of Eighteenth-Century Studies has nonetheless long been haunted by the Gothic, the uncanny, and the fantastic. From Newton’s alchemy to Mesmer’s acolytes, from *Die Zauberflöte* to *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, from the Salem witch trials to the Brothers Grimm, the long eighteenth century is framed by and shot through with magic. If, as Keith Thomas once wrote, “magic” can be defined as “the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are not available,” then our current moment demands a re-examination of this topic.

Throughout much of its history, of course, “magic” has been understood to designate cultural practices antithetical to the concept of modernity. Anthropologists such as Edward Tylor and James G. Frazer, for example, saw magic as the chief adversary of Western science, a practice that existed—for better or worse—primarily in “primitive” cultures. For Max Weber, it constituted one of the most “serious obstructions” to the rational organization of modern economic life. Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim, meanwhile, distinguished magic—as a private or cult practice—from the official or public rituals performed by religion. Though Sigmund Freud would reject this binary, seeing magic and religion as inherently similar systems of belief, he would nevertheless cast it as decidedly unmodern: a remnant from a superseded past, which served to shield modern culture from its most unsettling realities.

We invite papers interrogating the practice, theory, and representation of magic in the long eighteenth century in Europe, its colonies, and beyond. The Workshop is always open to colleagues working in any discipline or between multiple disciplines and has long been a home for contextualist history of ideas and various forms of historicism; we hope this year’s theme will prove especially rich for those working in the history of science, folklore, music, and performance studies. Papers informed by approaches that understand magic with reference to the foreign, the subaltern, or the Other (based in methodologies such as New Materialism, Black and indigenous studies, colonial and postcolonial studies, disability studies, gender and queer studies) are especially welcome.

We look forward to reading your abstracts and ideas. A non-exhaustive list of topics they might address would include:

- magic tricks and *la magie blanche*
- occultism, paganism, and druidism
- witchcraft and witch trials
- popular magic and “cunning folk”
- magical healing, prophecy, curses, and omens
- ghosts, fairies, and the undead

- prognostication, astrology, divination
- alchemy and transmutation
- possession, summoning, and other forms of demon worship
- obeah and Vodou
- the improbable, miraculous, and coincidental
- conspiracy and paranoia
- Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and other forms of mysticism
- the Gothic and literary supernaturalism
- illusion and *trompe l'oeil*
- aesthetic experience as magic
- histories of “disenchantment” and “re-enchantment”

During the Workshop, we will discuss pre-circulated texts (due in mid-April) and perhaps have an occasional lecture or visit to a library, museum, or archive. We are especially open to co- and multi-authored contributions, including those that work across hitherto conventional boundaries of genre, discipline, and media. We hope that participants will be present for the entire event but anticipate making provision for some online participation as well.

The application deadline is Friday, January 26, 2024. Please send a paper proposal (1-2 pages) and current brief CV (3 pages, max) to Dr. Barbara Truesdell, Administrator, Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Please e-mail to voltaire@indiana.edu.

We will acknowledge all submissions within a fortnight. If you do not receive an acknowledgment by February 9, 2024, please e-mail voltaire@indiana.edu or the Center’s Director, Jesse Molesworth (jmoleswo@indiana.edu).

Papers presented at the Workshop will be selected by an interdisciplinary committee. We reimburse most expenses for visiting scholars: accommodations, travel (up to a certain limit), and most meals. Expanded abstracts and/or entire papers may be published in the Center’s online open-access journal [The Workshop](#), along with discussion transcripts or summaries.