

## Call for papers

# *The Witch Reinvented: Contemporary Reconfigurations Between Rehabilitation and Connection to the Sensible*

Pau, Thursday 26 and Friday 27 February 2026

University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour

Study days organised by UR ALTER

"The figure of the modern witch is experiencing a revival that encompasses very diverse, sometimes opposing, motivations depending on the groups and individuals: a vision of women who are inherently close to nature, an authentic belief in magical powers, but also simple fun like Halloween witches, a pretext for the sale of esoteric and new age products."

Yann Kindo et Jean-Paul Krivine, *Sorcières, de l'histoire aux mythes modernes*, Afis Science - Association française pour l'information scientifique, 2025.

## Argument

The objective of these study days is to understand the current reconfigurations of the witch as a symbol of a renewed connection with the environment, as a vector of social connection and enhancement of the territory, beyond the discrimination and gender fractures that nevertheless persist.

This project is based on a notable contemporary phenomenon: the strong return, over the past twenty years, of the figure of the witch in literature, cinema and the visual arts, in France as well as in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Spain and Italy, but also in the public space through its exploitation in festivals, museums and interpretation centres (Zugarramurdi caves in Navarre, Villanúa Witches' Week in Aragon, etc.).

Stemming from ancient myths and legends, the witch undeniably carries an intrinsic ambivalence, between fascination and repulsion, exclusion and power. Long marginalised and historically persecuted during witch hunts, she became from the nineteenth century onwards – in the wake of Michelet's *La Sorcière* (1862) – the standard-bearer for generations of feminist and ecofeminist activists, in constructions that were often more political than historical. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, works such as those by Susan Griffin (*Woman and Nature: the Roaring Inside Her*, 1978) or Carolyn Merchant (*The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, 1980), underline the symbolic analogy between "woman and nature", which Western rational thought would have put forward to legitimise a dual system of reification and exploitation. Merchant devotes an entire chapter ("Nature as Disorder, Women and Witches") to the progressive devaluation of women, whose supposedly uncontrollable and wild character would have justified their accusation and condemnation for witchcraft. On this conceptual

foundation, the ecofeminism movement developed, marked, among other things, by the editorial success of Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), then, a few years later, by that of Mona Chollet's book, *Sorcières : La puissance invaincue des femmes* (2018), which made the witch a figure of a "powerful woman", inspiring contemporary feminisms.

Obviously, the evolutions of the witchcraft imagination, – of which we recall only a tiny part here –, give a glimpse of the porous nature of this mythical figure, its ability to crystallise varied and even contradictory representations, to embody the crises, fears, fantasies and desires that have crossed societies over the centuries.

If there is one major issue that is pressing today, it is that of the environmental crisis, which Baptiste Morizot and other thinkers interpret as a crisis of the sensible, that is to say a crisis of our relationships with the living: "By 'crisis of sensitivity', I mean an impoverishment of everything we can feel, perceive, understand, and weave as relationships with the living. A reduction in the range of affects, percepts, concepts and practices connecting us to it<sup>1</sup>."

In this troubled context, what figure better than the witch could symbolize renewed links with our environment? Associated with isolated life in rural or mountain environments, renowned for her knowledge of plants and their healing virtues, for her role as a healer or midwife, the witch is at the crossroads of:

- ancestral knowledge that has long been devalued,
- care practices towards humans and non-humans,
- and a privileged relationship with nature, often described as intuitive, sensitive, even spiritual.

Thus, the same characteristics that led to her marginalization and then her condemnation are now becoming symbolic and political resources for rethinking our relationship with the living. To what extent does the rehabilitation of this figure make it possible to bring communities together a shared history, to strengthen territorial identities, to enhance intangible heritage and ancestral knowledge (herbalism, rituals, tales, care practices, etc.)?

This study day intends to analyse the way in which the contemporary era reappropriates the figure of the witch, potentially bearing new sensitive links to nature as well as to society, by examining, on the one hand, the mechanisms of deconstruction of witchcraft stereotypes (the ugly, malevolent, isolated, irrational old woman); on the other hand, the production of emancipatory imaginaries and counter-discourses, where the witch becomes a mediator with the living, a figure of resistance (to patriarchy and extractivist capitalism), a catalyst for artistic and pedagogical practices.

This enrichment of emotions, imaginaries and knowledge also implies a conception of nature that goes beyond its status as an object of inspiration to confer on it that of an intimate partner in the invention and creation of forms. In many contemporary works, the witch is precisely the mediator of this displacement: a figure located at the interface between human and non-human, she allows us to experiment with new ways of entering into a relationship with the living. So many possible ways of imaginary, symbolic and cognitive enrichment of our relationship with nature, allowing us to look at the world through the eyes of other living beings, to relativize the place of humans in ecosystems, and to remind us that they are only a link in the chain of life.

<sup>1</sup> Baptiste Morizot, *Manières d'être vivant: enquêtes sur la vie à travers nous*, Paris, Actes Sud, Mondes sauvages, 2020, p. 21.

### ***Proposed areas of study***

We will give priority to contributions that address the figure of the witch, in literature and in the arts, according to the following axes:

- Repair
  - The witch considered in her double actantial position, agent and patient of repair, both as an object of symbolic rehabilitation and as a subject providing care and repair to others.
  - Witches through the activities of care, healing of bodies or restoration of territories;
  - The memory of persecutions, their symbolic compensation or historical justice;
  - Artistic and narrative practices as gestures of reconciliation.
- Connect
  - The witch as mediator between human / non-human, nature / culture, living / dead;
  - Source of reactivation of local, heritage and ritual traditions;
  - The role of witches in the cohesion or fragmentation of communities
- Feel
  - The witch on the path to a reconquest of the sensible and a reanimation of nature;
  - The sensory, synaesthetic, aesthetic and affective experiences related to the witch;
  - ecofeminism, alternative spiritualities, neopagan practices, contemporary witchcraft.

Methodological approaches may relate, for example, to sociocritical, ecopoetic and ecocritical perspectives, anthropology, philosophy or gender studies.

### ***General information***

These study days will be held on the Pau campus (University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour). They are part of the project: "Witches: from Marginalization to Reconciliation and Cohesion. Crossroads between Social History, Literature, the Arts and the Environment" (2025-2026) - UNITA Alliance, Starting Grant "Inclusive Societies".

They will welcome the photographer Judith Prat for the screening of her documentary *Decían que era bruja*, (*It was said of her that she was a witch*, 2023).

### ***Submission procedures***

Proposals for papers, including a title, an abstract (about 400 words) and a list of 5 keywords, should be sent **before January 15, 2026** to the following address: [ReCo.sorcieres@orange.fr](mailto:ReCo.sorcieres@orange.fr)

Please indicate your surname(s), first name(s), postal and electronic contact details, as well as your institution to which you are attached, and to attach a brief bio-bibliographical note (6 to 8 lines maximum)

Speeches can be made **in French, Spanish, English**.

### Organizing Committee

- Christelle Colin (MCF, Spanish Cinema, ALTER, UPPA) - christelle.colin@univ-pau.fr
- Alaia Davant (PhD Student, Contemporary Romance Literatures, UniTo/UPPA) - alaia.davant@unito.it
- Juliette Guy (PhD Student, Spanish Visual Arts, UPPA) - jguy@univ-pau.fr
- Pascale Peyraga (PU, Contemporary Spain - Literature/Visual Arts, ALTER, UPPA) - pascale.peyraga@univ-pau.fr

### To feed your thoughts...

ABRAM David, *The spell of the sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world*, New York : Vintage Books, 1996.

BENOIST Jocelyn, *Le bruit du sensible*, Paris : les Éd. du Cerf, 2013 (Passages).

BOUCHERON Patrick, « Le sexe du pouvoir (7), L'histoire en puissance : en quête des sorcières » | Collège de France », Cours du 18 février 2025. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpSfPTg0WYQ>.

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ZANCARINI-FOURNEL Michelle, *Sorcières & sorciers: histoire et mythes : lettre aux jeunes féministes*, Montreuil : Libertalia, 2024.