



UNIVERSITÀ  
DI TORINO



1<sup>st</sup> International Conference  
for Young Researchers

***A kind of magic: Interdisciplinary visions and insights of magic***

University of Turin  
May 29-31, 2024

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

The XXXVIII cycle of the PhD Course in Humanities of the University of Turin is pleased to announce the PhD Conference *A kind of magic: Interdisciplinary visions and insights of magic*, to be held on 29-30-31 May 2024 at the University of Turin.

The controversial nature of what is - more or less legitimately - called 'magic' is hardly linked to an unambiguous semantic and disciplinary field. Over the years, attempts to dialectically trace its horizon of meaning, comparing it with fields with clearer boundaries, such as science or religion, have been more frequent than those aimed at identifying its intrinsic specificities. In modern linguistics, as well, the sacred and magical-religious aspects of language have been almost entirely neglected (Cardona 2006[1976]:192). Nevertheless, «for a long time, magic has been a matter for speculation» (Mauss 2005 [1902]:14). Moreover, even though «the studies of ancient philosophers, alchemists and theologians were purely practical in nature and belong more to the history of magic itself than to the history of those scientific studies which have been devoted to the subject», hence the formers were fundamental and propaedeutic for the latter, the first of which «is the work of the brothers Grimm» (*ibidem*).

It is not surprising that this field was inaugurated by the authors of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812-1822), considering the blurred character that the concepts of 'fairy-tale', 'fantastic' and 'magic' tend to assume even today, in literature and elsewhere. Since the early twentieth century, some of the texts which would then become the basics of semiotics - such as *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) by Propp - contributed to bring these issues back

to attention. And the same did some new artistic movements, such as magic realism, which started in the pictorial field, and later spread in literature, starting from Borges's *A Universal History of Iniquity* (1935). A similar poetry can even be found in cinema, for example in *Spirited Away* (2001) by Miyazaki, a movie which underlines the connection between magic and the big screen. This intimate link can be traced back to the early experiments of Méliès, the first to employ the Lumière cinematograph not with purely documentary purposes, but to implement his illusionistic shows, thanks to the introduction of film editing and real special effects. This capability to fascinate, which is common to technological and scientific progress and magic, is often conceived as a kind of 'science before science' (Frazer, *The Golden Bough*). However, it only partially figures out the complex polymorphism of magic, and the way it has been conceptualized in different cultures and ages. For example, during the Middle Ages magic and astrology were considered to be the domain of the demonic (Vasoli 1976), while, according to treatises such as the *Liber Anaguemis* (9<sup>th</sup> century) or the *Picatrix* (1256), during the Renaissance they have been reanalysed as a mean to establish the unlimited human lordship over the world (*ibidem*). Then, during the Romanticism they changed their value once again, as can be seen from the concept of 'magical idealism' expressed by Novalis or the *mise-en-scène* of ballets like *La Sylphide* (1832) and musical theater works like Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (1831).

However, far from being a mere legacy of the past, magic, indeed, may turn out to be a key element to interpret our present and future, starting from the reality that surrounds us. In this sense, the case of the city of Turin is emblematic: starting from Dembech's journalistic survey, it started to be seen as the common vertex of both the so-called 'triangle of white magic' and the 'triangle of black magic'. As for the case of the 'magic circle' theorized by Huizinga in *Homo ludens* (1938), whose porosity allows for a continuous exchange between real and fictional space, the phenomenon of magic seems to affect different aspects of everyday life and could represent both an independent and a transversal field of investigation. This makes it worthy to be deepened by academic studies aiming at outlining its formal features, functions and unexplored potentiality.

Bearing in mind these purposes, the conference will be an opportunity to discuss the theme in the following fields:

1. literature, theater, music, cinema and new media
2. semiotics and ludology
3. linguistics

The panels of the conference might be thematic, and not necessarily based on disciplines, hoping to promote a debate amongst scholars from different fields.

The conference is aimed at PhD students and early researchers (max. 2 years from the end of their PhD). Following the principles of exchange and collaboration at the basis of the conference, multi-participant submissions are welcome.

The official languages of the conference will be Italian, English, and French.

Each presentation will last around 20 minutes.

## MAIN TOPICS

### Literature, Theater, Music, Cinema and New Media

- Magic in cults and ritual practices across centuries and continents.
- Magic, religion, and science from Medieval and Renaissance treatises to science fiction
- Magic symbolism: representations of characters, objects, and situations of the magical imagery, between established *topoi* and new interpretations.
- On the audience's side: fascination and enchantment in the reception of the artworks.

### Semiotics and Ludology

- Illusions, filters, and metamorphosis: magic as a way to imitate or distort reality, between sign invention and illusionistic trick.
- Spatiality, *affordances* and lucidity in magical symbols and objects.
- Magic thought and conspiracy theories. Fallacy or symbolic form?
- D&D, Magic and other forms of doing of the magic in ludic texts.

### Linguistics

- Curses, blessings, and magic spells: structural properties and pragmatic and discursive functions of magical utterances (see for example the notion of *performative utterance*).
- Magic spells in inscriptions and texts: evolution of forms over time; linguistic and stylistic features of the texts.
- Magic and onomastics: the magical in dialectal toponymy; anthroponyms and toponyms in fantasy novels and translation strategies.
- An etymology of magic: etymological derivations and grammaticalization processes in the lexicon and the constructions related to magic.

- An ethno-linguistics of magic: typology of the magical usages and their relationships with the cultures they belong to; sacral and magical aspects of language; magical figures and their designations in folk beliefs.

## **SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS**

Researchers interested in joining the conference are invited to fill in this online form (<https://forms.gle/NxB4CNRpAnMVSqvg7>) with the following information:

- institutional email address
- name of author(s)
- affiliation
- status
- disciplinary scope of the proposal
- abstract (max. 2000 characters including spaces, excluding bibliography); the abstract must be attached in .pdf format and must be anonymous: the file name will be a keyword representative of the proposal.

The deadline for submission is **6<sup>th</sup> December 2023**.

The registration fee is 20€/person.

Publication of the Conference Proceedings is planned, following an evaluation of each contribution made by the members of the Scientific Board.

## **BOARDS**

- **ORGANISING BOARD**

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## CONTACTS

Any requests for information or clarification can be addressed to the organizers at the following email address: [convegno.magia@unito.it](mailto:convegno.magia@unito.it)

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