

**Women's Scientific Literatures:
The Poetry and Poetics of Early Modern Natural Philosophy**

26–27th June 2025, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge

Deadline for submissions: Monday 3rd March 2025

Contact email: WomensScientificLiteratures@gmail.com

The international AHRC/DFG research consortium, *Scientific Poetry and Poetics in Britain and Germany, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Anglia Ruskin University; University of Bayreuth; University of Marburg; University of York), invite proposals for their second conference.

Plenary speakers

- Danielle Clarke (University College Dublin)
- Helena Taylor (University of Exeter)

Confirmed speakers

- Liza Blake (University of Toronto)
- Sajed Chowdhury (Utrecht University)
- Johanna Luggin (Innsbruck University)
- Whitney Sperrazza (Texas A&M University)
- Elizabeth Swann (Durham University)

How did early modern women poets engage with and contribute to natural philosophical thought? ‘Women’s Scientific Literatures: The Poetry and Poetics of Early Modern Natural Philosophy’ will explore a substantial body of poetic work by early modern women that engages knowingly and creatively with natural philosophical ideas. While recent scholarship has drawn attention to the scientific knowledge embedded in women’s recipe books and natural philosophic prose, we have yet to fully uncover the specific and sustained engagement with the natural sciences in female-authored verse and poetics, particularly in manuscript or in under-explored printed texts. This is the case especially in poetic texts that have not been read through a scientific lens but nevertheless demonstrate sophisticated scientific knowledge. Taking up forms from the epigram to the lyric, papers will show how early modern women used literary and material poetic forms as productive, experimental spaces to explore scientific ways of thinking.

One of the major ‘discoveries’ in early modern scholarship over the past few decades is the extent to which women writers, including Margaret Cavendish, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Émilie du Châtelet produced incisive scientific writing and engaged with contemporary natural philosophy. There remains, however, an extensive body of lesser-known manuscript literature by women on scientific subjects, and, of equal importance, a pressing need for a methodological realignment in how we understand this material. Jaime Goodrich and Paula McQuade recently argued for “a feminist philosophical approach to early modern women’s writing, in which scholars do not write about female authors but rather think with them about the great existential questions that have vexed generations of human beings” (2021). This is a timely and urgent call to action, which demands a rediscovery of the philosophical themes and vocabularies that pervade texts written by women.

With particular attention to lesser-known, marginal or unpublished work, this conference will examine how early modern women were exploring natural philosophical topics in depth across a range of literary forms and in devotional, fantastical, political, autobiographical and elegiac writings

as well as in predominantly natural philosophical texts. Examples might include the presence of atomic physics in devotional lyric; explorations of botany and astronomy in country house poems and hexameral narratives; reflections on anatomy in political verse. By drawing attention to overlooked, surprising, or unconventional occurrences of scientific thought, we seek to rethink the contexts and philosophical knowledge base of early modern women's writing, as well as the history of the relations between natural philosophy and poetics more broadly.

Topics of interest might include:

- Women's use of poetic genres and forms as vehicles for scientific knowledge (devotional, occasional, dedicatory; the elegy, the ode, the epigram etc.).
- Natural philosophical vocabularies including, but not limited to, cosmology and astronomy; the body, soul and medicine; botany and alchemy in women's poetic texts.
- Women's participation in (and exclusion from) spaces and communities of learning, including scientific and philosophical circles and academies, salons, literary coteries, correspondence networks, and patronage networks.
- How scientific ideas filter into other frameworks of women's poetic writing, such as the theological, political and domestic.
- Relations in women's scientific-poetic writing between early modern vernaculars and neo-Latin.
- Instances of transcultural and transnational encounter and exchange in women's natural philosophic writing.
- The role of manuscript and printed texts in preserving women's natural philosophical works.
- Comparative studies of male and female literary engagement with natural philosophy.
- Recovery of lesser-known, marginal, or unpublished work by women writers.
- The historiographical exclusion of women's poetry from histories of science and philosophy.
- New methodologies for reading women's poetic writing.

Please send proposals of up to 300 words for 20-minute papers or contributions for roundtables (in English), along with a short biographical note (c. 50 words), to WomensScientificLiteratures@gmail.com by **Monday 3rd March 2025**. We welcome submissions from graduate students and ECRs. Please get in touch with any questions.