

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Magic

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CREATIVE HISTORIES OF WITCHCRAFT

France, 1790–1940

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Abstract: How can researchers study magic without destroying its mystery? Drawing on a collaborative project between the playwright Poppy Corbett, the poet Anna Kisby Compton, and the historian William G. Pooley, this Element presents thirteen tools for creative-academic research into magic, illustrated through case studies from France (1790–1940) and examples from creative outputs: write to discover; borrow forms; use the whole page; play with footnotes; erase the sources; write short; accumulate fragments; re-enact; improvise; use dialogue; change perspective; make methods of metaphors; use props. These tools are ways to ‘untell’ the dominant narratives that shape stereotypes of the ‘witch’ which frame belief in witchcraft as ignorant and outdated. Writing differently suggests ways to think and feel differently, to stay with the magic rather than explaining it away. The Element includes practical creative exercises to try as well as research materials from French newspaper and trial sources from the period.

Keywords: Creative histories, witchcraft, French history, writing as research, practice-based research

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