Abstract

Contemporary ideals of science representing disinterested and objective fields of investigation have their origins in the seventeenth century. However, 'new science' did not simply or uniformly replace earlier beliefs about the workings of the natural world, but entered into competition with them. It is this complex process of competition and negotiation concerning ways of seeing the natural world that is charted by the essays in this book. The collection traces the many overlaps between 'literary' and 'scientific' discourses as writers in this period attempted both to understand imaginatively and empirically the workings of the natural world, and shows that a discrete separation between such discourses and spheres is untenable.

The collection is designed around four main themes-'Philosophy, Thought and Natural Knowledge', 'Religion, Politics and the Natural World', 'Gender, Sexuality and Scientific Thought' and 'New Worlds and New Philosophies.' Within these themes, the contributors focus on the contests between different ways of seeing and understanding the natural world in a wide range of writings from the period: in poetry and art, in political texts, in descriptions of real and imagined colonial landscapes, as well as in more obviously 'scientific' documents.

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