

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURAL HISTORY: MARINE ANIMALS AND STRANGE CREATURES IN EDWARD TOPSELL'S *THE HISTORIE OF SERPENTS*

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Abstract: *Using and analysing Topsell's translations and explanations of the sea creature's existence, this essay attempts to demonstrate literature's role as a cultural discourse that preserves developing conceptions of early modern water imagery and to begin questioning the existence of particular creatures in the world, their relationships with the inner and the outer space of their experience. I will focus rather more on scientific facts than social or moral values, but I am always concerned with validation of natural history, as The Historie of Serpents, Or, The Second Booke of Living Creatures (1608) represents a broad collection of observational data. Natural history is a prism through which to discover Renaissance culture, while each creature or mythical beast presented in the book is attentively described. Topsell compendium is a mix of ancient and contemporary sources, with the names of serpents, dragons and bees, their moral description, conditions of living and particular traits, examining how real-life sea-creatures merge with fantastic ones, supported by powerful illustrations. I argue that Edward Topsell's compendium had a significant impact on Renaissance culture and his imagery of the serpents and sea-creatures was transferred to dramatic interpretations of the natural world in diversified ways.*

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