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Memberships can be renewed through the website, or by contacting the Membership Secretary, Jessica Evans (j.roberts@edu.salford.ac.uk). Please note that the standard annual membership fee is £25 and that the fee for unwaged members is £10.

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Contribute to the arts blog, which can be read by all visitors to the BSLS site: www.bsls.ac.uk/category/arts_blog. Leave a post on any related cultural events of interest.

University of Surrey’s Guildford campus (photo courtesy of University of Surrey)

Conference at the University of Surrey

The ninth BSLS conference took place on 10-12 April 2014 at the University of Surrey in Guildford. Winners of the two postgraduate bursaries, Robert Daly and Alison Cardinale, offer their reflections on this year’s conference.

This year’s BSLS conference in Guildford was my first. But, having been enormously impressed both by the quality of the papers given and by the sheer breadth of research presented, it will certainly not be my last. Among many excellent panels, two highlights were ‘Reading with Dinosaurs’ and ‘Seeing Things’. The former was undoubtedly a crowd-puller: Katherine Ford, Melanie Keene, and Will Tattersdill examined changes in how dinosaurs have been represented in the modern era. Ford focussed on the visual representation of dinosaurs in the nineteenth century, Keene turned to the Crystal Palace monsters, and Tattersdill concluded the panel by offering an engaging analysis of the image of the dinosaur as a point of intersection between two pasts: the prehistoric, of course, but also the self-consciously historical appropriation of that era throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Will Abberley, Franziska Kohlt, and Laura Ludtke gave
equally varied papers in the ‘Seeing Things’ panel. Abberley, one of the BBC’s New Generation Thinkers, looked at how Victorian scientists wrote about natural mimicry. Kohlt at the perception of supernatural phenomena in Victorian psychology and literature, and Ludtke at the representation of artificial light in early twentieth-century fiction. The papers led to an interesting discussion of the representation of seeing as a point of intersection between literary and scientific writings, an approach with significant implications for narratology.

After two fascinating keynote lectures by Jim Al-Khalili and Mary Orr, Bernard Lightman brought the conference to a close with a gripping talk on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Lightman illustrated a number of significant episodes in Conan Doyle’s biography before going on to identify an important source – in the figure of Georges Cuvier – of Sherlock Holmes’s celebrated ability to reconstruct the broader context of a crime from a tiny scrap of evidence. Cuvier’s skill in drawing conclusions about an organism on the basis of a mere fragment of bone, Lightman argued, had served as a model for Holmes’s brilliant leaps from effect back to cause, the hallmark of his investigative method. The ‘scientific detective’, it seems, has a scientific pedigree.

‘I was impressed by the sheer breadth of research presented’

The BSLS conference was an opportunity for researchers from many different fields to meet, present their work, and discuss the fundamental questions raised by the interaction of literature and science. For me, this diversity was the most valuable feature of the conference: as an audience member, I was surprised to discover common ground even with papers that were — on the face of it — very distant from my own work on Soviet intellectual history; as a speaker on one of the panels, I found it very productive to have to articulate the significance of my research outside the narrow area of Russian studies. The BSLS conferences provide a unique forum in which these questions can be reframed from a very wide range of perspectives. I would like to thank the organisers, and particularly Gregory Tate, for a very enjoyable event and for the opportunity to give a paper and write this report.

Robert Daly (University of Oxford)

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In a flight that was, to me, as miraculous as that of keynote speaker Professor Jim Al-Khalili’s migratory ‘quantum robin’, I flew from Sydney, Australia to participate in the ninth annual BSLS conference and to enjoy my first experience of pale English sunshine. I found the session on ‘Perspectives on Quantum Theory’ intriguing and relevant to my own research on quantum horrors and vision. The conference program featured my key research pre-occupations including principles of classification, indeterminacy and imaginative speculation in the fields of chemistry, physics and astronomy. Engaging with ideas at the BSLS conference has enhanced my research on these wide-ranging Coleridgean concerns.

I delivered a paper on the unlikely links between the principles of poetics of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and quantum mechanics. My panel session was enlivened by Peter Garratt’s fascinating work on Dickens as a writer inspired by hearing voices and John Holmes’s illuminating scientific reading of William Morris. Question time was lively and stimulating and the convivial atmosphere continued at the conference dinner that evening. By the time many of us visited Down House we had forged the friendships that such an intimate and diverse conference gathering can foster, and many enjoyed a bus trip through the English countryside and walks through the gardens of Charles Darwin.

To illustrate the depth and diversity offered by the panel sessions I will give a brief summary of the panel on Sciences of the Mind. Joanna Malicka analysed Christine Brooke-Rose’s encounter with her ageing body as a challenge to conceived, Cartesian notions of the separation of body and mind, taking clues from neurology and Antonio Damasio’s emphasis on an embodied mind. An older ‘science of the mind’, psychoanalysis, was explored in the novels Maren Scheurier discussed in ‘Magicians and Mechanics of Souls: Psychoanalysis as Beleaguered Science in Contemporary Literature’. In novels by Robert Menasse, Siri Hustvedt, Hanif Kureishi, and Annette Hug, psychoanalysis is valorised mostly as a therapeutic practice rather than as a science, with a strong tendency towards literature through its focus on narrative, listening, metaphor, poetry, and magic. Both papers shed light on the connections and inevitable discrepancies between different approaches to exploring the mind, be they neurological, psychoanalytic, or literary.

A personal highlight was a panel session on neuro-narratives, which meshed beautifully while provoking intelligent extended discussion from a packed room, with questions answered in thoughtful detail by Natalie Roxburgh and Anna Auguscik. Discussion spilled over into morning tea and at lunchtime we were stimulated by the teaching workshop where I received helpful suggestions for pairing texts to allow for illuminating study of

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literature and science in a Romantic context. Greg Tate chaired this session in a generous and open fashion that made the loose grouping of international delegates feel like a cohesive cohort of teacher-researchers, a cohort I was very pleased to belong to in such a wonderfully collegiate space. The conference twitter feed has allowed for further communication even after we flew home to our distant universities.

I do hope the fates of literature and science become further entwined as a result of this exciting exchange of cross-disciplinary perspectives – for the speakers involved and for our distinctively hybrid audience. Sincere thanks to the organisers, particularly Greg Tate, and I wish everybody the best in their research until the opportunity to catch up again in Liverpool next year.

Alison Cardinale (University of Sydney)

With thanks to Robert and Alison for preparing their reports. *

Teaching Literature and Science: A Symposium

The inaugural BSLS symposium was held in November at the University of Westminster on the topic of teaching literature and science. Will Tattersdill, who organised the symposium, comments on the day.

The first BSLS symposium - conceived as a shorter, themed event to be held opposite the conference each year - was held at the University of Westminster on Saturday, November 8th. The theme was ‘Teaching’: a shorter session on the subject held as part of this year’s conference in Surrey had identified a mood among members for a more sustained discussion.

Martin Willis opened the proceedings by inviting delegates to ruminate on why it might be now that this mood has developed. Literature and Science seems to have taken a while to have found its way onto the undergraduate curriculum, and its exact place there was the subject of much fruitful discussion over the day.

We learnt that there exists an enviable breadth of teaching on our subject, rarely discussed, and heard perspectives from undergraduates as well as exchanging courses, challenges, and ideas. Wide-ranging though the day proved, my hope is that the conversation is not over; that we continue to think together about how our methodological approaches might most profit our students.

While it’s not yet clear what will come of this symposium, the conversation is sure to continue. One thing that has definitely been mooted is some sort of ‘dossier’ of courses convened by BSLS members, envisioned as a possible resource for those putting together teaching ideas of their own.

Many thanks to the BSLS for supporting this event.

Will Tattersdill

The John Thelwall at 250 conference was held on 25-27 July 2014 at the Londom campus of the University of Notre Dame. The conference paid particular attention to Thelwall’s life and work in the scientific and medical communities, including his lectures on Animal Vitality, which entered into the vitality debate with the surgeon John Hunter at the end of the eighteenth century. Organisers included Yasmin Solomonescu, whose new monograph John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination (2014) examines the influence of science on Thelwall’s political and literary work. Sharon Rustori’s keynote on the Saturday discussed ‘Medicine, Science, and Literature in Thelwall’s Lifetime’. Further papers covering scientific and medical aspects included Mary Fairclough’s ‘Electricity, Vitality, and Political Health in the 1790s’, and Michael Brown’s “Bats, Rats, and Barristers”: The Lancet, Libel, and the Radical Stylistics of Early Nineteenth-Century English Medicine. The conference schedule also included tours of sites Thelwall visited and places where he worked. The conference began with a tour of his elocutionary Institution at Lincoln’s Inn fields, and the Saturday afternoon included a visit to the Old Operating Theatre Museum on Thomas Street. This visit was accompanied by a talk in the dissecting room given by the curator, Kirsty Chilton, on the surgeon Henry Cline, Thelwall, and Guy’s Hospital. The conference concluded in style with a banquet in the Royal College of Surgeons of London, and some time exploring the weird and wonderful medical collections in the Hunterian Museum.

Jessica Evans
**Commission on Literature and Science: Inaugural Conference**

John Holmes reports on the first conference held by the new Commission on Literature and Science, held this summer at the National Hellenic Research Foundation in Athens.

In July I went to the inaugural conference of the new Commission on Science and Literature at the National Hellenic Research Foundation in Athens. The Commission – or CoSciLit – is part of the Division of the History of Science and Technology (DHST) of the International Union for History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IUHPST). As Chair of the British Society for Literature and Science (BSLS), I had been asked to support the foundation of CoSciLit. Its aim is to provide an international forum for research into literature and science, and to demonstrate to scientists and historians of science how important literature is to thinking about what science means, now and over time. Literature is a key source for the history of science. At the same time, it is and has always been the perfect device for refracting the apparently clear light of science into a multitude of different colours, shades and wavelengths.

I was looking forward to the conference very much. It lived up to my expectations. The range of papers was tremendous. I listened to talks by literary scholars from Britain, America and France, scientists and historians of science from Greece, Germany and Austria, and the poet and physicist Iggy McGovern from Ireland. Topics included dinosaurs in American frontier fiction, eighteenth-century satires on the Royal Society, Emily Dickinson’s response to Charles Darwin, mesmerism in nineteenth-century Greece, sexology in civil war Spain, and contradictions in the physics of Jules Verne’s *Around the Moon*. My own talk was on evolution in modernist epic poems. It was fascinating to hear so many different examples of literature engaging with science, and of literary analysis shedding light on the science itself. I was especially glad to have the chance to see this from the perspectives of scientists themselves, and from so many different countries. Perhaps the biggest lesson I learnt from the conference as a whole was that science maybe international, but it is conducted in different national contexts, which shape what science is done, what discoveries are made, and how they are seen.

On the last day of the conference I was appointed along with the organizers, George Vlahakis and Kostas Tampakis, to a small committee charged with putting in place a constitution for the Commission and holding the first elections to its official executive committee next year. We’ve also been asked to start planning CoSciLit’s future, including another conference in a couple of years, and its involvement in the next of the DHST’s huge fourth-yearly congresses in Rio de Janeiro in 2017. I am looking forward very much to working with George and Kostas to help build on the foundations they have laid, to cementing the strong links that have already been built up between CoSciLit and the BSLS, and to getting more and more literary scholars, scientists and historians from around the world involved in the rich discussions instigated at this excellent conference.

If you’d like to find out more about the plans for CoSciLit as they develop, and more widely about work being done and conferences being held on literature and science, we have a link to their website on the BSLS site.

*John Holmes*
New Executive Committee Members

We are delighted to announce that Josie Gill, Jenni Halpin, and Martin Willis have agreed to serve on the Executive Committee. The Society records its gratitude to the outgoing Committee members they replace, Daniel Cordle, Vike Plock, and Stuart Robertson, all of whom have contributed greatly to BSLS for several years.

Josie Gill (Communications Officer)
Josie is Lecturer in Black British Writing of the 20th and 21st Centuries in the English Department at Bristol University. She joined Bristol in 2014, following a PhD at Cambridge. Josie’s research interests include literature, genetics, and epigenetics, with particular reference to African American writing. She has an article on Salman Rushdie forthcoming in Textual Practice.

Jenni Halpin (Member at Large)
Jenni is an Assistant Professor of British Literature at Savannah State University. She has wide-ranging interests which include contemporary drama. Jenni is a contributor to the New Directions in Theatre and Science issues of Interdisciplinary Science Reviews edited by fellow BSLS members Carina Bartleet and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr.

Martin Willis (Treasurer)
Martin is Professor of Science, Literature and Communication at the University of Westminster, London. He is the founder of the peer-reviewed Journal of Literature and Science, and the author and editor of several books, including Vision, Science and Literature, 1870-1920: Ocular Horizons (Pickering and Chatto), winner of the BSLS Book Prize 2011. He is currently researching the British Association for the Advancement of Science, from 1832 to the present.

Completed PhDs

- Fran Bigman (University of Cambridge): ‘“Nature’s a Wily Dame”: Abortion in British Literature and Film, 1907-1967’.

Funding awards

Peter Garratt is a Co-Investigator on a major new project exploring ‘A History of Distributed Cognition’, funded by the AHRC (2014-18). The project is a collaboration between the universities of Edinburgh, Stirling and Durham, and is being led by Professor Douglas Cairns. Cognitive science today increasingly shows that the act of thinking does not happen in the head alone, but rather is distributed across brain, body, and environment. We allow our mobile phones to store phone numbers, for example, offloading memory onto a readily available non-biological resource. With a particular emphasis on literary and cultural histories, the project examines forms of distributed thinking—or the extended mind—from the ancient world to the modern.

BSLS book reviews

We continue to provide online reviews of new academic books in the field, including studies of literature, medicine and technology, often covering the latest and most important titles well before print and electronic journals have published their own reviews. Visit www.bsls.ac.uk/reviews. If you would like to become a reviewer, or have written a book and wish it to be reviewed, please contact the Reviews Editor, Peter Garratt, by email (peter.garratt@durham.ac.uk).

News in brief

Andrew Lacey has been appointed as a Senior Research Associate on the Davy Letters project (http://www.davy-letters.org.uk) at Lancaster University. Since completing his PhD at Newcastle University in 2012, Andrew has worked as a Research Assistant on two Romantic-period editions: volume four of The Poems of Shelley (Routledge, 2013), and volume three of The Letters of William Godwin (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

At the Cheltenham Literature Festival in October, Peter Garratt chaired a discussion with the neuroscientist Baroness Susan Greenfield on ‘Is Technology Changing the Brain?’. The event was sponsored by the AHRC.

The latest edition of the trilingual science studies journal Mètode is titled ‘Crossroads’ and dedicated to Literature and Science: http://metode.cat/en/revista/68-crossroads. It features an article by BSLS member Romén Reyes-Peschi. All articles are available in English and may be downloaded from the site.

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Reports on Small Grants

Joanne Ella Parsons (Bath Spa University) and Sarah Chaney (UCL) were awarded a small grant to organise a public symposium, ‘Body and Mind: Mesmerism in Nineteenth-Century Culture and Literature’ on 17th October 2013, held at St. Bart’s Hospital in London.

On 17 October last year, Sarah Chaney and I organised a public seminar at St Bartholomew’s Hospital Pathology Museum on ‘Body and Mind: Mesmerism in Nineteenth-Century Literature and the history of science. Building on previous ‘Damaging the Body’ events (for more details see http://damagingthebody.org/archive/), we reached an audience of 139, consisting of academics, museum visitors, and the general public. Professor William Hughes (Bath Spa University) spoke about early Victorian newspaper accounts of mesmerism in ‘The Theatre of His Beastly Exhibitions: The Erotic Nature of Early Victorian Magnetism’. Dr Andreas Sommer (University of Cambridge) then gave a detailed account of the role of mesmerism and hypnotism in the formation of modern psychology in Germany.

The Damaging the Body seminar series is an established interdisciplinary network, which aims to open up discussion of the ways in which histories of bodily damage in medicine and literature might open up our understanding of body-mind relations more generally. This event explored a field which has remained strikingly absent from study: the relationship between the sciences and Victorian and Edwardian mesmerism, psychical research and parapsychology.

Joanne Parsons

2014 Small grants winners

BSLS small grants are awarded for events that increase the understanding of literature and science, and may fund visiting speakers, seminar series, debates, or other suitable kinds of events. The latest winners are:

- Ryan Sweet and Betsy Lewis-Holmes, the organisers of EXEWHIRR, a public-engagement event on ‘The Human-Technology Relationship through the Ages’ at the Bike Shed in Exeter.
- Joanne Parsons on behalf of the Postgraduate Contemporary Women’s Writing Network for a symposium on Biomedical Science and the Maternal Body at Senate House in London.
- Roisin McCloskey on behalf of the Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies at Durham University, for travel bursaries for a postgraduate conference on ‘Abnormality and the Abnormal in the 19th Century’.

Reports on these events will appear in the next Newsletter.

Farah Mendelsohn (Anglia Ruskin University) was successful in applying for support to host a talk by Sarah Dillon (University of St Andrews) on ‘What Scientists Read: How Does Literature Influence Scientific Thought and Practice’ as part of the Loncon 3 (World Science Fiction) convention in London, 14-18th August.

We were delighted to host Dr Sarah Dillon at the World Science Fiction Convention in London this summer. There were 1200 programme items and 70 exhibits. The convention attracted 8000 people and more than a hundred turned up at Sarah’s talk. The convention is a science and arts festival, so we had artists, writers, comics writers and artists, alongside astronomers, cell biologists, zoologists and architects. It was the perfect place for Sarah’s talk and poster session on What Scientists Read.

Farah Mendelsohn

Loncon 3, held at the ExCel, London

New Book

BSLS member Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, Professor of English at the University of Toulouse and Associate Researcher at the Alexandre Koyré Center for the History of Science and Technology in Paris, has recently published the new title Fairy Tales, Natural History and Victorian Culture (2014), in Palgrave’s series Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture.

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**Book prize winner**

The winner of the 2013 Book Prize was Robert Mitchell for his *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

Nominations for this year’s book prize are now being accepted. To be eligible, titles must be dated 2014. Members may nominate their own books. For more details contact Peter Garratt (peter.garratt@durham.ac.uk) by 15th January 2015.

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**Calls for papers**

The following CFPs and conference notices have been received:

- (Re)Imagining the Insect: Natures and Cultures of Invertebrates, 1700-1900. A One Day Interdisciplinary Conference, Warwick University, 7th March 2015. (insectconference2015@gmail.com)

- John Keats: Poet-Physician, Physician-Poet, 1815-1821, A Bicentenary Conference organised by the Keats Foundation, Gay’s Hospital, London, 1st-3rd May 2015. (hp27@est-andrews.ac.uk)

- Abnormality and the Abnormal in the Nineteenth Century conference, Durham University, 7th May 2015. (cncs@durham.ac.uk)

- Postgraduate Medical Humanities conference, University of Exeter, 20th-21st July 2015. (pgmedhums@exeter.ac.uk)

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**BSLS-JLS Essay prize**

The prize for the best new essay by an early career scholar on a topic within the field of literature and science is jointly organised by the BSLS and the Journal for Literature and Science.

This year the prize was won by *Emilie Taylor-Brown* for her essay ‘(Re)Constructing the Knights of Science: Parasitologists and their Literary Imaginations’. Congratulations to Emilie.

The prize is open to members who are postgraduate students or have completed a doctorate within three years of the submission date. (To join BSLS, go to www.bsls.ac.uk/join-us/). The prize is judged jointly by representatives of the BSLS and *JLS*.

Essays should be currently unpublished and not under consideration by another journal. They should be between 6,000 and 8,000 words long, inclusive of references, and should be sent by email to both Dr John Holmes, Chair of the BSLS (j.r.holmes@reading.ac.uk), and Professor Martin Willis, Editor of *JLS* (m.willis@westminster.ac.uk), by 12 noon on 31st May 2015.

The winning essay will be announced on the BSLS website and published in *JLS*. The winner will also receive a prize of £100. The judges reserve the right not to award the prize should no essay of a high enough standard be submitted.

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**2015 BSLS conference**

The tenth annual conference of the British Society for Literature and Science will take place at the University of Liverpool, on 16-18th April 2015. Keynote talks will be given by Professor Keith Barnham (Imperial College London), Dr Patricia Fara (University of Cambridge), and Dr Claire Preston (Queen Mary University of London).

The BSLS invites proposals for twenty-minute papers, or panels of three papers, on any subjects within the field of literature and science. In addition, ‘flash talks’ of up to 7 minutes on any topic are invited for a special plenary session. Other formats are also welcomed, but please email your suggestion to the organisers (bsls2015@liverpool.ac.uk) for consideration, well in advance of the submission deadline.

This year the organisers would particularly welcome proposals addressing the themes of light, optics, vision and colour, and proposals for papers, panels or roundtables on engaging the public with literature and science research. However, the BSLS remains committed to supporting and showcasing work on all aspects of literature – including comparative literature and European and world literatures – and science, medicine and technology.

Proposals of no more than 250 words, together with the name and institutional affiliation of the speaker, and a biographical note of around 50 words, should be sent in the body of messages (not in attachments) to (bsls2015@liverpool.ac.uk). Proposals for panels should include a separate proposal and biographical note for each paper. The closing date for submissions is **Friday 5th December 2014**.

The BSLS Executive Committee would like to thank all those who contributed information and updates to the Newsletter.

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**Oxford Literature and Science seminar**

Oxford’s Literature and Science seminar continues to meet, usually on Friday afternoons in Oxford term time; details of forthcoming sessions appear on lit-sci-ox.org; all are welcome (whether members of the University or not); contact Michael Whitworth (michael.whitworth@ell.ox.ac.uk) if you would like to present a paper.

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