



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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CONFERENCE NOTES

TWELFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BSLS

6-8 APRIL 2017

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

The 12th annual BSLS conference^{3/4}my first one abroad^{3/4}was everything I wanted it to be and more. It *is* a shame I hadn't found this organisation earlier, as it is the most stimulating and open forum for everyone venturing into the shadowy realm of interdisciplinary studies in literature and science. I spent four days in Bristol from 5 April till 8 April, and the location itself proved to be quite suitable for a PhD student prone to escapism (such as myself). The campus was worth the 15-minute-long steep climb every morning (I was staying at the Premier Inn Haymarket): beautiful and calm streets, historic buildings, and trees in bloom, with unbelievably sunny and warm weather in tow were an invigorating start to my day, though I still think that the climb itself was worth at least two cups of coffee.

By the end of the conference, I had attended twenty-five talks, including the keynotes, and, I must be honest, I felt utterly exhausted during the last four or so. The programme was intense, and this is a compliment on my part; during most conferences, I am inclined to skip one or two panels, but here I wished I

could have a time-turner à la Hermione Granger, so that I could attend parallel panels. At one point I truly felt that I am never going to know as much as I want to, and I can only hope that others also felt the same after some mind-blowing panels. Truth be told, I could simply list all the talks I attended as the highlights of the conference, but as student currently wrestling with her dissertation, the safest bet is to refer to the papers which directly helped in my own topic which is some Early Modern science, some cosmology, and some fine English poetry with an ample amount of angst.

I believe I should start by mentioning the keynote speaker who, after his talk, received a storm of applause. Ralph O'Connor (University of Aberdeen) delivered a mesmerising and very witty paper on science writing and literature, touching upon all the struggles one might face when embarking on this journey. He managed to draw our attention to the fact that we tend to use literature already established in our research, and that nonfiction prose still had a somewhat ambiguous position in the course of interdisciplinary writing. The talk challenged everyone to step out of their comfort zone and explore what lies beyond the 'safe zone' of science writing and works of literature and to look at, for example, popular scientific nonfiction as a possible source. The talk managed to reassure me in my ever-wavering conviction that research needs to be done, as any text is still an integral part of our culture and utterances.

Another mention is due to Moritz Ingwersen, a PhD student from Trent University, Ontario, and the University of Cologne, with whom I share a common interest in 17th century science and obsession with its effects on the human psyche. His was the first talk on

The BSLS promotes
interdisciplinary research into the
relationships of science and
literature in all periods.

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the period, and I was finally hit by the realisation that I am not the odd one out, and the topic still has a plethora of hidden nooks and crannies to explore and debate on. I am similarly indebted to Rachel Crossland from the University of Chichester who took on the quite ungrateful but immensely exciting task of exploring the oeuvre of a not yet established poet, Rebecca Elson: her showcased poems led me to discover a modern writer and scientist who I believe bears the sensitivity and insight of her Early Modern counterparts.

Livia Sacchetti from Rome also received my undivided attention and enthusiasm: she started to explore the structure of Shakespearean plays as parallel to the several coexisting cosmological systems, and we also had a lovely chat on how space and time intertwine in such complex texts.

Besides informing us of some quite interesting workshops, research groups, and other great opportunities during the annual general meeting, Maria Avxentevskaya from Berlin also delivered a paper on her ongoing research concerning imagined communities and the genre of the *album amicorum*, a handy little diary/guidebook which consisted of several visual entries, pieces of advice, and things a student of medicine is required to learn not only about his field, but also about life in general. These little books travelled some great distances and became^{3/4}as I understand it^{3/4}an interactive, polycentric medium very much like Facebook today, as Maria explained. I am also greatly indebted to Matthew MacKisack from the University of Exeter, who started exploring the parallels between Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and modern cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). His train of thought was greatly convincing and it also made me realise an important addition to my own thesis.

It would be folly to mention all speakers, as all talks I have attended left a lasting impression on me. I am still quite dizzy from the experience, and I will be sure to attend as many programmes and conferences as I can; and I am very grateful to the organisers and the BSLS for their work and for granting me a bursary which enabled me to attend the conference in the first place. See you all very soon, and I hope to continue the swerving and collision of ideas with many of you.

Ágnes Füzessy-Bonác



It was delightful and a little daunting to see the BSLS attendees fill the buildings of my home institution, the University of Bristol, on a particularly warm few days in April 2017. The proceedings had absorbing start with Havi Carel's discussion of organ donation. Using a fairy tale about a man who released his shadow which eventually returned to him and caused his death, Carel described how this may be applied to our understanding of the substitution of identity in all illness narratives. This lecture set the tone for the conference, which examined, among other topics, pharmacology and sickness, physics, technologies, and energy in literature.

I was struck by the wide variety of topics covered, and left the conference feeling excited to hear about the developments of these projects next year. Chisomo Kalinga's multimedia presentation on oral medical narratives in Malawi was one of the highlights of the conference, demonstrating the fruitfulness of an anthropological approach to the field of literature and science. The roundtable discussion, 'Collective Knowledge', similarly affirmed the international scope of the conference. Filmed by a robotic camera which followed the sensors worn by the speakers, the panel was recorded for the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE), who will respond directly to these papers in May. All four speakers engaged with the discussion of museum studies and collective interest in science through distinct yet complimentary approaches. Verity Burke discussed the influence of Dr Kahn's Museum of anatomy and Wilkie Collins' reaction to entertainment of this type. John Holmes examined the interaction of poetry with architecture in the Museum of Natural History in Oxford. Janine Rogers used the connection between the material and divine in illuminated manuscripts to describe scientific objects as relics, and Sophie Thomas saw the internal referentiality of house-museum objects as distinctly literary. The panel led to an interesting discussion which showcased the intersection of disciplines within the study of museums and I eagerly await the responses to these papers.

The three excellent keynote lectures were as varied as the panels. Ralph O'Connor's extremely witty plenary lecture, 'What makes science-writing "literary", and should we care?' kept every attendee engaged and entertained. He

identified science-writing and literature as something created by what we do to the text, while also extolling the rather unusual natural history writings of John Crompton, brother of Richmal. Following this excellent lecture, we made our way into the centre of the city to the convivial conference dinner. The next day brought another packed morning of panels and Robert Mitchell's enlightening plenary, which was an excellent ending to an illuminating conference.

I would like to thank the organisational team behind this year's conference, and Ros Powell in particular, for such a wonderful event and for giving me the opportunity to attend.

Amelia Lean

UPCOMING EVENT

Will Abberley (University of Sussex) is curating an exhibition on literature and ornithology at the Booth Museum of Natural History in Brighton, which will be open to the public from the 19th of May to the 21st of September 2017. 'Stories on the Wing: British Birds in Literature' explores both how writers have used birds as symbols and metaphors, and how scientific investigators have used narrative to document and understand avian behaviour. The exhibition will involve a series of free public talks, including contributions by the novelist Nicholas Royle and nature writer Mark Cocker. See more information here: <http://brightonmuseums.org.uk/booth/exhibitions-displays/stories-on-the-wing-british-birds-in-literature/> The exhibition and events form part of the AHRC-funded project *Land Lines: Modern British Nature Writing, 1789-2014*.

NEW PHDs

CLAIRE POINSOT

" 'Mnemosyne Lay in Dust': Pathologies of Collective and Individual Memory in W. B. Yeats's and J. M. Synge's Drama, 1892-1939"

Claire Poinot has successfully presented her thesis on 25 November 2016 at the Université Paris 3 -Sorbonne Nouvelle. It was completed under the supervision of Pr. Carle Bonafous-Murat.

CLARE STAINTHORP

“‘[T]hese seemingly rival spheres constitute but one Cosmos’: Constance Naden as Scientist, Philosopher, and Poet.”

Clare Stainthorp has successfully completed her PhD at the University of Birmingham.

Through her poetry and essays Constance Naden (1858-1889) sought to create an interdisciplinary philosophy predicated upon finding unity in diversity. By providing close-readings of Naden's poems, essays, and unpublished notebooks, this thesis demonstrates the extent of her secular world-scheme which synthesised science, philosophy, and poetry. I begin with an intellectual biography that situates Naden's scientific education, philosophical ideas, and poetic output in their nineteenth-century contexts. This creates a framework for understanding the trajectory of Naden's endeavours as scientist, philosopher, and poet. In the subsequent chapters I demonstrate how these three strands of her intellectual life were fundamentally intertwined. Chapter Two focuses upon Naden's engagement with scientific ideas and the scientific imagination, specifically examining the important of light as it manifests in the study of botany, astronomy, physics, and physiology. Chapter Three turns to Naden as philosopher, teasing out the details of her childhood faith (newly demonstrated by the notebooks) and analysing her developing relationship with the freethought movement and wider philosophical discourses. Chapter Four analyses Naden's equivocal relationship with poetic tradition, focusing on her shifting engagement with Romanticism, and her use of the lyric 'I' and the comic mode.

RECENT BOOKS

Daniel Cordle's new book, *Late Cold War Literature and Culture: The Nuclear 1980s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) has been published. The book theorises the 1980s as a nuclear decade, focusing on British and United States fiction. Ranging across genres including literary fiction, science fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, graphic novels, children's and young adult literature, thrillers and horror, it shows how pressing nuclear issues were, particularly the possibility of nuclear war, and how deeply they penetrated the culture. It is innovative for its discussion of a "nuclear transatlantic," placing British and American texts in dialogue with one another, for its identification of a vibrant young adult fiction that resonates with more conventionally studied literatures of the period and for its analysis of a "politics of vulnerability" animating nuclear debates. Placing nuclear literature in social and historical contexts, it shows how novels and short stories responded not only to nuclear fears, but also crystallised contemporary debates about issues of gender, the environment, society and the economy.



CALLS FOR PROPOSALS, PAPERS, AND REVIEWERS

BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM: POSTGRADUATE-LED EVENT

BSLS will trial the Winter Symposium as a postgraduate-led event. It is anticipated that this event would have a specific theme, and might also cover research training and career advice alongside showcasing ongoing research. As always, it is hoped that the event will have a 'non-conference' feel, and include different types of papers, panels, and ways of sharing knowledge. The BSLS Committee will support the conference organisers throughout the process, helping those with little experience to host a successful event.

Proposals are invited from postgraduates, and from early career researchers who were recently postgraduates, for a themed one-day event to take place in or about November, to be emailed to Rosalind Alderman (rsaa1e09@soton.ac.uk) by 1 June 2017. Proposals should be no longer than two-sides of A4, and should include a theme and description, details of the organising group and location, potential speakers (if known) and types of papers, panels or other sessions to be included. The BSLS will award up to £500 in support of the symposium, which should be free to attend if possible.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Society is pleased to announce its continuing collaboration with the Journal of Literature and Science to award a prize for the best submitted essay on a literature and science topic by postgraduate and early career members. Last year's winner was Rachel Murray, a PhD student at Bristol, for her excellent essay on Beckett and worms. See this for free in the most recent issue of the JLS at www.literatureandscience.org.

Essays should be currently unpublished and not under consideration by another journal. They should be approx. 8,000 words long, inclusive of references, and should be sent by email to both Josie Gill, Communications Officer of the BSLS (josie.gill@bristol.ac.uk), and Martin Willis, Editor of the JLS (willism8@cardiff.ac.uk), by 12 noon on Friday, 11th August, 2017.

The prize is open to BSLS members who are postgraduate students or have completed a doctorate within three years of this date. (To join BSLS, go to <http://www.bsls.ac.uk/join-us/>).

Martin Willis
BSLS Chair

BSLS REVIEWS

The BSLS Reviews editor would like to encourage potential book reviewers to get in touch with him; post-graduate students, or those outside the university world with a professional interest in a topic, are especially welcome. You can find a list of books that are ready to be sent out for review here:

<http://www.bsls.ac.uk/reviews/currently-seeking-reviewers/>

You can contact the Editor, Gavin Budge, on G.Budge@herts.ac.uk for further information and if you would like to propose a book for review—anything published from 2014 onwards will be considered.

Gavin Budge

CALL FOR REVIEWERS

The *Journal of Literature and Science* <http://www.literatureandscience.org> is once again looking for reviewers to review various articles in the field of literature and science published in the last year to 18 months.

Please find below a number of articles that we would like to offer for review in the Journal. The list is by no means definitive; there's such a lot of fascinating work out there, so please do let me know if there's an article not on the list that you'd like to review.

It's largely first come, first served, so do get in touch with an offer to do a specific article m.geric@westminster.ac.uk

Reviews should be 750 words long. For more details please follow the link: <http://www.literatureandscience.org> or contact Michelle m.geric@westminster.ac.uk to register your interest.

SUGGESTED ARTICLES:

- E. K. Kelly, "Experience has not yet learned her letters': Narrative and Information in the Works of Francis Bacon." *Configurations* 24.2 (2016): 145-171.
- E. L. Johnson, "Life Beyond Life': Reading Milton's *Areopagitica* through Enlightenment Vitalism." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 49.3 (2016): 353-370.
- Rachel Trubowitz, "Reading Milton and Newton in the Radical Reformation: Poetry, Mathematics, and Religion." *ELH* 84. 1 (2017): 33-62.
- Paul Gilmore, "Charles Brockden Brown's Romance and the Limits of Science and History." *ELH* 84. 1 (2017): 117-142.
- Gregory Tate, "Keats, Myth, and the Science of Sympathy." *Romanticism* 22. 2 (2016): 191-202.
- L. S. Thomasen and H. K. Sørensen, "The Irony of Romantic Mathematics: Bridging the Historiographies of Literature and Mathematics." *Configurations* 24.1 (2016): 53-70.
- Sari Altschuler, "From Empathy to Epistemology: Robert Montgomery Bird and the Future of the Medical Humanities." *American Literary History* 28. 1 (2016): 1-26.
- Gowan Dawson, "Dickens, Dinosaurs, and Design." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 44. 4 (2016): 761-778.
- Franziska E. Kohlt, "'The Stupidest Tea-Party in All My Life': Lewis Carroll and Victorian Psychiatric Practice." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21. 2 (2016): 147-167.

- Jonathan Potter, "The Stereoscope and Popular Fiction: Imagination and Narrative in the Victorian Home." *Journal of Victorian Culture* (2016): 346-362.
- Jim Endersby, "Deceived by Orchids: Sex, Science, Fiction and Darwin." *The British Journal for the History of Science* 49 (2016): 205-229.
- Eleanor Dobson, "Gods and Ghost-Light: Ancient Egypt, Electricity, and X-Rays". *Victorian Literature and Culture* 45.1 (2017): 119-35.
- Clare Stainthorpe, "Activity and Passivity: Class and Gender in the Case of the Artificial Hand." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 45. 1 (2017): 1-16.
- L. Wilhelm, "The Utopian Evolutionary Aestheticism of W. K. Clifford, Walter Pater, and Mathilde Blind." *Victorian Studies* 59. 1 (2016): 9-34.
- Tyson Stolte, "'The Infinite within the Finite': Victorian Prosody and Orthodox Theories of Mind." *Victorian Poetry* 54. 3 (2016): 245-274.
- Karen Dieleman, "Evolution and the Struggle of Love in Emily Pfeiffer's Sonnets." *Victorian Poetry* 54. 3 (2016): 297-324.
- J. L. Lieberman & R. R. Kline, "Dream of an Unfettered Electrical Future: Nikola Tesla, the Electrical Utopian Novel, and an Alternative American Sociotechnical Imagery." *Configurations* 25. 1 (2017): 1-27.
- Cassandra Laity, "Eco-Geologies of Queer Desire: Elizabeth Bishop's Love Poetry and Charles Darwin's Beagle Geology Travel Narratives." *Contemporary Women's Writing* 10. 3 (2016): 429-450.
- Jeffery Blevins, "Absolutism, Relativism, Atomism: The 'small theories' of T.S. Eliot." *Journal of Modern Literature* 40. 2 (2016): 94-111.
- A. Caracheo, "The Measurement of Time: Mann and Einstein's Thought Experiments." *Configurations* 25. 1 (2017): 29-55.
- Heather A. Love, "Cybernetics Modernism and the Feedback Loop: Ezra Pound's Poetics of Transmission." *Modernism/Modernity* 23. 1 (2016): 89-111.
- Cedric Van Dijck, "Time on the Pulse: Affective Encounters with the Wristwatch in the Literature of Modernism and the First World War." *Modernist Cultures* 11. 2 (2016): 161-178.
- Kirsty Martin, "Modernism and the Medicalization of Sunlight: D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, and the Sun Cure." *Modernism/modernity* 23. 2 (2016): 423-441.
- Michael Allan, "Re-Reading the Arab Darwin: The Lewis Affair and Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire*." *Modernism/modernity* 23. 2 (2016): 319-340.
- Joseph Darlington, "A Non-Euclidean Novel: Christine Brooke-Rose's *Such* and the Space-Age Sixties." *Journal of Modern Literature* 40. 2 (2016): 147-164.
- Christopher D. Kilgore, "Bad Networks: From Virus to Cancer in Post-Cyberpunk Narrative." *Journal of Modern Literature* 40. 2 (2016): 165-183.

EXPLORATIONS IN SCIENCE AND LITERATURE

NEW SERIES: CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Do you have a proposal that would fit this exciting new series? For more information and to submit a proposal, please contact John Holmes: J.Holmes.1@bham.ac.uk

Explorations in Science and Literature is a new series on key points of intersection between science and literature. This series will explore the full range of literary engagements with and representations of science, including medicine and technology. It has a particular mandate to bring the insights of literary study to bear on science itself; to consider the significance of literature from within a scientific worldview; and to explore the role of literature within the history of science.

Books will be aimed jointly at scholars and students of literature, historians and sociologists of science, and scientists and science students working within the relevant field, as well as at general readers who share an interest in science and its place in culture and society. Ultimately, we aim to bring these distinct academic disciplines and cultures together by concentrating on specific points of intersection between science and literature. By showing how each field can be enhanced by a knowledge of the others, we hope to enrich the study of science, both as a subject and in its own enquiries, and of literature, and to cultivate a new cross-disciplinary approach to fundamental questions in both fields.

The series will encompass topics from across the physical, biological and social sciences, together with medicine and technology, wherever literature can inform our understanding of the sciences, their origins and their implications. Similarly, we welcome books on literary forms and techniques where these bear on or are informed by the sciences, and on how science itself has been articulated, with the literary analysis shedding light on its concepts and approaches. As appropriate, the books may circumscribe their analyses historically, confining their accounts to particular periods, or geographically, considering perspectives from regions within or beyond the hegemony of European and North American science and literature. While literature in the broad sense of written texts will be the focus of the series, discussions within individual books may take in and focus on other cultural forms including drama, film, television, and other arts and media.

We welcome proposals from literary scholars, scientists, and historians and sociologists of science. All the books will be double peer-reviewed as pieces of original research. They may be monographs, co-authored works, or collections of related essays as appropriate. Authors will be encouraged to write in an inclusive style, so as to accommodate an interdisciplinary readership.

Series Editors

John Holmes, Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture, University of Birmingham, UK

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SMALL GRANTS REPORT

‘THE MEMORY OF TREES’ CONFERENCE REPORT



‘The Memory of Trees’ one-day conference took place at the University of Liverpool on 20 April 2017. The event was held in affiliation with the Literature and Science Hub, and was facilitated with the generous contributions of the School of the Arts and the BSLS Small Grants Scheme. The event focussed on the cultural representation, study, and conservation of trees and woodlands. As such, this theme allowed for a diverse day of interdisciplinary conversation, and a celebration of the immutable and branching record of our ongoing relationship with trees and their memory.

Matt Larsen-Daw from The Woodland Trust opened the conference with a presentation on the campaign he is currently leading, The Charter for Trees, Woods and People. In partnership with multiple institutions, charities, and conservation initiatives, The Charter aims to protect the public’s right to access trees and woodland spaces, to collect people’s memories of these sites, and to influence future policy making in relation to the preservation of these environments. For more information on The Charter, please go to <http://treecharter.uk/sign>.

The day comprised of four main panels. Firstly, ‘Trees, Localised Identities and Historical Continuity’ examined the histories of specific (rural and urban trees) and how these spaces have influenced their surrounding terrains and inhabitants (and vice versa). Whilst the panel on ‘Evelyn Onwards’ took a look at the intersection of scientific, literary, and artistic examinations of trees across the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Meanwhile, the session on ‘Woodland Writings and Intertextuality’ scrutinised literary representations of trees as a physical and psychological phenomenon. Lastly, ‘Arboreous Languages and Visual Representation’, looked at the usage of trees as a form of communication, from the construc-

tion of ancient runes to the manifestation of woodland space in the digital age.

In addition to this, we had a presentation on ‘Not Being Able to See the Symbolism for the Trees: A Scientist’s View of Woods and Forests’ from Hugh McAllister; McAllister was a lecturer in Integrative Biology and the resident botanist at Ness Gardens until his retirement in 2010. In his talk, he explored the disparity in the perception of ‘man-made’ and ‘natural’ forests, and explored the valuable (and ancient) ecologies of woodlands in Russia, Tibet, Japan, Scotland, Wales, and North America.

The day concluded with a key-note lecture from Fiona Stafford, Professor of English at the University of Oxford, and author of the acclaimed *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (2016). Stafford’s lecture on ‘The Memory of Trees’ focussed on how trees as physical and memorial objects can “connect scattered moments of experience”. In using examples from the works of William Blake, Paul Nash, Seamus Heaney, William Wordsworth and more, she explored the idea of how our multi-sensory associations and responses to these environments can be seen to be rooted in our childhood experience of them.

Overall, the day provided the means to discuss both the ‘memory of trees’ in the individual and cultural imagination, as well as how these intertwined perceptions impact upon our on-going treatment of trees and woodland.

The money donated to ‘The Memory of Trees’ from the BSLS paid for four postgraduate travel bursaries and fee waivers for the event. I would like to thank the society for its contribution, as this support assisted in the overall success of the conference.

Anna Burton
University of Liverpool