



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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## TWELFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BSLS 6-8 APRIL 2017 UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

Keynote talks will be given by Professor Havi Carel (University of Bristol), Professor Robert Mitchell (Duke University), and Professor Ralph O'Connor (University of Aberdeen).

Membership: conference delegates will need to register as members of the BSLS (annual membership: £25 waged/ £10 unwaged). It will be possible to join the BSLS when registering for the conference online; please visit the conference website for fuller details: <https://bsls2017conference.wordpress.com/>

The conference is organised by Dr Ros Powell, and is generously supported by [BIRTHA \(Bristol Institute of Research in the Humanities and Arts\)](#).



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

**Winter 2017 Newsletter**

## SMALL GRANTS REPORT

**'DOING SCIENCE:  
TEXTS, PATTERNS,  
PRACTICES'**

**20-21 NOVEMBER 2015**

The conference took place at the University of Cologne. The work of Bruno Latour, who came to the University of Cologne as Albertus-Magnus-Professor earlier in 2015, provided a touch point to explore the conference keywords 'doing science', 'texts', 'patterns', and 'practices'. We particularly followed up on impulses of Latour's thinking that move scientific practice and its interrelations with texts into critical

focus, but that also point beyond texts to a focus on *practice* and *doing* science.

Scholars from Germany, Denmark, Poland, Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain presented research ranging from medical studies and history of science to theatre studies, art history, and literary and science studies. The diverse disciplinary perspectives in the group greatly contributed to the engaging discussions and also to lively informal exchanges over coffee and dinner. The rallying points of 'doing science' and the terms 'texts', 'patterns', and 'practices' ensured that disciplinary variety did not lead to a dispersal of the discussion but illuminated a common complex of questions from various perspectives.

The keynote by Professor Norbert Schaffeld from the University of Bremen provided insight into the narrative of emergent scientific discourse and the historical science novel that both provided the participants with a common point of reference and sparked critical discussion. In the panel on inter-actions between the sciences and the arts, Oliver Hochadel focused on the relationship between paleo-anthropological research and paleofiction from the perspective of a historian of science. Julia Boll reported from the 'field', reflecting on an experimental lecture series. Based on her experience of holding lectures in dialogue between a literature/theatre scholar and a scientist, with performers and dancers, Boll examined more general questions about the nature of the stage as a laboratory and of the usability of theatre to think through notions of the experimental and reassess conceptions of scientific facts and scientific evidence. In a session on mediating science, Kanta Dihal presented her research on scientific conflict in astrophysics popularisations, and Moritz Ingwersen explored the trickster figure as a mediator in the science fiction by Neal Stephenson and the science philosophy of Michel Serres. A panel on literature, featuring talks by Harald Pittel on the evolution of an ethic of science, with a focus on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Maxim Shadurski on Huxley's eugenics in *Brave New World*, closed the first day and gave participants food for thought until we met in an Italian restaurant to continue the conversation over dinner.

Anna Rasokat opened Day 2 with a talk on Graham Greene's imagining of leprosy, followed by Pia Heidemeier's presentation on genetically modified food in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, discussing implications for the conceptualisations of posthuman identities and ethics. The final panel featured three talks with a historical perspective. Adi Efal focused on the 'birth of science' in the seventeenth century and explored the role of figures and figuration in Descartes's construction of scientific method, addressing questions as to the relation of the figure to imagination and to physical reality, as well as the limits of figural knowledge. The introduction of these key terms and categories opened up avenues of discussion with Laura Søvsø Thomsen's research at the intersection of the fields of literature and science and of visual culture of science with a focus on the visual and textual strategies in works by Alexander von Humboldt and Erasmus Darwin. Ana Duarte Rodrigues reported on a recent project aimed at increasing sustainability and heritage identity of Algarvean gardens by recovering practices found in historical texts and traditional sources. She addressed the project's negotiations of demands and expectations of diverse stakeholders and its conscious use of historical text and tradition to popularise its aims. This last paper opened up a broader discussion on the ethical dimension in doings of science as well as in the doings of interdisciplinary research that may yield practical recommendations and consequences.

All speakers participated in a final roundtable discussion that specifically addressed questions of interdisciplinarity, disciplinary preconceptualisations, and challenges in communicating across disciplines. The final session helped identify tacit disciplinary assumptions and styles of reasoning that surfaced during the conference and that have to be addressed explicitly to ensure constructive dialogue between disciplines. We look forward to making available the fruits of the conference and of the roundtable discussion on disciplinary, thematic, and methodological concerns in the special issue 42.3 (September 2017) of the journal *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*.

Nina Engelhardt

**Doing Science**

TEXT | PATTERNS | PRACTICES

20-21 NOVEMBER 2015 | 10:00

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY  
CONFERENCE BETWEEN  
THE ARTS AND  
THE SCIENCES *Guests welcome!*

a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne  
3rd floor | Aachener Str. 217 | 50931 Köln

Please register:  
Nina Engelhardt@uni-koeln.de  
Julia.Hoydt@uni-koeln.de

Further information and programme:  
http://artes.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de  
http://anglistik.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/23582.html

The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

a.r.t.e.s. research lab

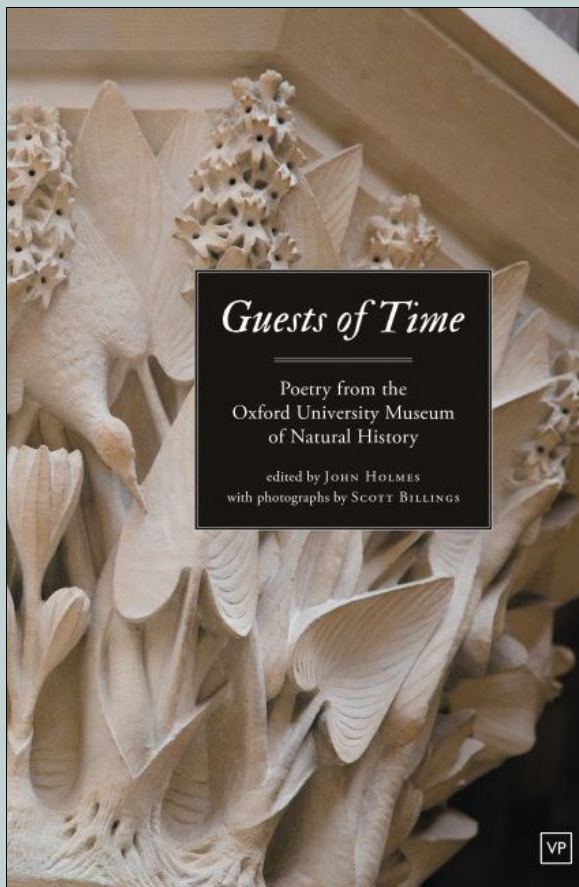
a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne

Universität zu Köln

## BSLS ON TWITTER

Join the conversation between the conferences and follow @TheBSLS on Twitter.

# RECENT BOOKS



*Guests of Time: Poetry from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History* (Scarborough: Valley Press, 2016), edited by John Holmes with photographs by Scott Billings

In 2016, the Oxford University Museum of Natural History hosted three poets-in-residence: John Barnie, Steven Matthews, and Kelley Swain. Inspired by their time delving into the museum's drawers and cabinets, looking at its art and architecture, and talking with the curators and researchers who work there, the poets' new work views the museum and its collections with fresh eyes. This new anthology prints the poems they wrote during their residency alongside Victorian poetry by writers connected with the early days of the museum and an introduction by John Holmes tracing the role of poetry alongside the other arts in the museum's genesis. Together, the poems in this anthology are a tribute to the Pre-Raphaelite origins of the Oxford University Museum, and a rejuvenation of its artistic legacy.

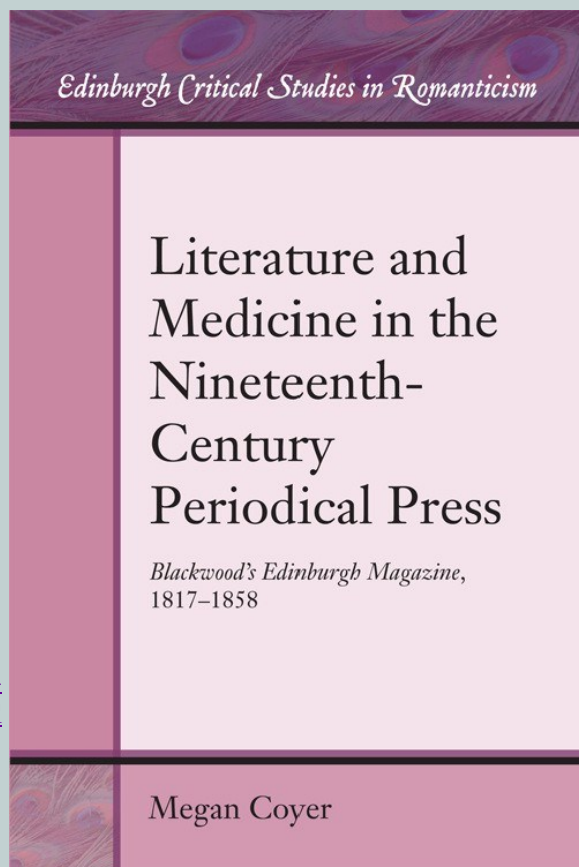
[http://www.valleypressuk.com/book/82/guests\\_of\\_time](http://www.valleypressuk.com/book/82/guests_of_time)

Megan Coyer. *Literature and Medicine in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 1817-1858*. (Edinburgh UP, 2016).

The first major study of the relationship between Scottish Romanticism and medical culture.

In the early nineteenth century, Edinburgh was the leading centre of medical education and research in Britain. It also laid claim to a thriving periodical culture. *Literature and Medicine in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press* investigates how Romantic periodicals cultivated innovative literary forms, ideologies and discourses that reflected and shaped medical culture in the nineteenth century. It examines several medically-trained contributors to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the most influential literary periodical of the time, and draws upon extensive archival and bibliographical research to reclaim these previously neglected medico-literary figures. Situating their work in relation to developments in medical and periodical culture, Megan Coyer's book advances our understanding of how the nineteenth-century periodical press cross-fertilised medical and literary ideas.

<https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-literature-and-medicine-in-the-nineteenth-century-periodical-press.html>



# NEW PHDs

Seyedeh Anahit Kazzazi  
University of Sussex

‘Performing Science: New Physics and Contemporary British and American Science Plays’

The present study uses the science of new physics (relativity theory and quantum mechanics) to construct a rigorous framework for analyzing the phenomenon of ‘science plays’, and as a means of exploring the implications that the new physics has for understanding theatrical representations. Basic facets of relativity theory and quantum mechanics are explained and used to develop an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the contemporary wave of science playwriting in Britain and America, the two cultures that have predominated in the tradition of science plays during the last three decades. Using a new approach to contemporary theatre, this study bridges the divide that still persists between science and the humanities by suggesting a new area where they intersect.

Seeking to provide an analysis of different understandings of science plays, this study also critically examines classifications used by science, theatre, and performance scholars, and offers alternative categories that allow this genre to be viewed in a different light. It furnishes a framework for the analysis of contemporary British and American science plays based on the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics. As such, the current study provides a coherent methodology that can be applied to a wide range of post-war science plays. Furthermore, it provides an in-depth analysis of a number of science plays, including *Oxygen*, *After Darwin*, *W;t*, *An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Mnemonic* and *A Disappearing Number* within the context of new physics.

Catherine Oakley  
University of York

‘Vital Forms: Bodily Energy in Medicine and Culture, 1870-1925’

This thesis explores a conceptual understanding of the body as an economy of ‘energy’. It examines the range of real and imaginary practices that this understanding inspired and also the ways in which bodily energy was defined, discussed, and culturally represented in Britain and the US across the period 1870-1925. It argues that we should read energy beyond its usual confines in literature and science studies, where it is considered primarily as a physical phenomenon associated with thermodynamics.

Drawing selectively on a wide range of primary sources – scientific writing, popular science periodicals, newspaper commentaries, literary fiction, and silent film – it analyses visual and textual sources that represent bodily energy in terms of corporeal functionality, vitality, and a capacity for work. Employing a cultural materialist approach, and including marginal texts and little-studied archival materials in its enquiry, the thesis integrates cultural and scientific forms to illuminate the ways in which literary and filmic texts intersected with medical and commercial designs for the ideal body of late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century capitalism: energized, productive, appetitive, and youthful. I argue that reading bodily energy in the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods reveals that discourses of degeneration are only part of the story of the human body at this time, and I offer new perspectives on discourses of corporeal regeneration and rejuvenation that have not received equivalent critical attention.

Romén Reyes-Peschl  
University of Kent

‘Convolutions: Writing the Mind and the Neurology of the Literary Brain’

A convolution is a loop, or a fold, as the folds of the brain are sometimes termed the cerebral convolutions. But it is a loop in another sense, in the way stories or narratives are referred to as convolutions (or convoluted) if their plots and themes are complex or resist linear, straightforward reading. These senses are well established, but in this thesis I propose a new interpretation of convolution (or convolving) as a metaphor for a process imbedded in multiple texts, discourses and disciplines, primary among which are literature, neuroscience and philosophy of mind. Highlighting this looping, reflexive process means actively engaging in it, and thus I ultimately promote the heretofore unremarked phenomenon of convolution as a self-conscious practice.

The thesis tracks this overarching metaphor of convolutions through a series of sub-metaphors, or chapter-length instantiations of convolutions, departing from an interrogation of the revolutionary rhetoric of neuroscience and running through quests, detectives, labyrinths and ballistics. A concluding chapter gathers all these overlapping threads together, suggesting how the notion of convolutions might have important ramifications beyond neuroscience and literature – for new textual methodologies, epistemological categories, interdisciplinary endeavours, and above all, for new conceptions of the self.

# FURTHER UPCOMING MEETINGS, CONFERENCES, AND CALLS FOR PAPERS

## SCIENCE AND LITERATURE READING GROUP – CAMBRIDGE

The long-running Science and Literature Reading Group, affiliated with the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge, continues to thrive. We are currently working our way through the elements: first we explored fire, from cosmic force to comic verse. A focus on a characteristically diverse set of texts meant we were able to draw connections and comparisons across a wide range of genres from many different time periods: preoccupations with fire as sensory experience, destructive or generative element, experimental tool, lively anthropomorphised creature, and divine power, recurred in pieces from Heraclitus to Pepys, Dickens, Tyndall, and even Belloc. We are next taking to the air, with a focus on eighteenth-century pneumatics in science, medicine, music, and poetry, and later in the year will bring our conversations down to earth, and on to the water.

To find out more, including themed reading lists and recaps of our meetings, follow us on Twitter [@scilitreadgrp](#) and visit our blog: [sci-lit-reading-group.blogspot.com](#). Or, if you happen to be in town, then everyone is more than welcome to come along!

*Melanie Keene*

## THE MEMORY OF TREES THURSDAY 20TH APRIL 2017 LITERATURE & SCIENCE HUB UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Our keynote speaker will be Professor Fiona Stafford (Somerville College, Oxford), author of *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (2016)

From root-tip to the upper-most branches, trees are at once single entities and part of a much wider community and environment. This interdisciplinary, one-day conference aims to bring together current and different strands of research that focuses on the cultural representation, study and conservation of trees and woodlands.

Proposals from any discipline or context are invited. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Representations of trees, forests, or woodland ecologies in Literature or the Visual Arts (of any period or context).
- The Wood-Wide-Web: trees and communication.
- Woodland and forest ecologies.
- Trees, conservation and climate change.
- Dendrochronology and woodlands of the past.
- Ancient trees, historical and cultural memory.

If you are interested in presenting at this event, please submit a 200-word paper proposal and a short biographical note by 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017 to Anna Burton at [hsaburto@liv.ac.uk](mailto:hsaburto@liv.ac.uk) General expressions of interest or questions about the event are also welcome. The registration fee is expected to be £20, and will include lunch and refreshments.

## ASLE-UKI BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2017 *CROSS MULTI INTER TRANS*

We would like to invite you to the ASLE-UKI Biennial Conference 2017, *Cross Multi Inter Trans* between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, co-hosted by the School of English, Sheffield Hallam University, the School of English, University of Sheffield, and the School of Design, University of Leeds. For details and the CFP please visit the conference website <https://asleukiland2017.com/>. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook [@ASLEUKI2017](#) for more updates!

*Veronica Fibisan*  
Postgraduate Researcher, The University of Sheffield