



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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ENGLISH: SHARED FUTURES BSLS PANEL NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

English: Shared Futures was a three-day bonanza in July at Newcastle University, designed to celebrate and interrogate both the diversity of that baggy monster we call “English” and its wider social relevance. The great and the good of the subject were present – typified by an early session on the place of English as a defender of the humanities which saw presentations from Helen Small, Stefan Collini, Amanda Anderson and Chris Newfield.

Our own Society was there in force. Six of us were present for the BSLS special panel: myself as Chair, and with short papers from Janine Rogers, Greg Tate, Michael Whitworth, Catherine Oakley and Josie Gill. We had chosen our panel to offer something of the variety of the work of the Society and to capture its range in terms of career stage and geographical reach. As I noted in my introduction, we had presenters speaking on early modern scientific objects, late Victorian poetry, early twentieth century science & medicine, and contemporary literature. Papers focussed, too, on the politics, methods and ethics of literature and science research. Our presenters came from across three of the nations of the UK and from North America. We were joined, too, by a new addition: the BSLS



Drs. Michael Whitworth and Josie Gill,
with the BSLS Banner

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

Summer 2017 Newsletter

banner (pictured, with Michael and Josie) which had caused a bit of a stir on Twitter (it’s a little on the large side). Those of you attending next April’s conference will get to see this in all its glory at Oxford Brookes.

The good-sized audience for our panel (30-40 at my count) spoke, I think, to the range we were offering, and the fact that we diverged from the usual 3-person 20 minute paper model that was common across the conference. Indeed, the first questioner

from the audience was enthusiastic in saying it was the best panel he had attended. This was met with significant agreement from the rest of the audience, who also noted the diversity and importance of the work being discussed.

This, I think, was the strength of the Society's contribution: at a conference that was, at times, fairly homogenous and rather focussed on elite cultures, we revealed ways of thinking and researching differently. The five speakers all exemplified how our own brands of interdisciplinary scholarship offer a richness of perspective aligned to a fruitful self-consciousness that makes for some of the best work in "English" today.

Martin Willis
BSLS Chair

POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE FUND BURSARY REPORTS

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT (ASLE) CONFERENCE 2017: RUST/RESISTANCE: WORKS OF RECOVERY

As one of the awardees of this year's BSLS Postgraduate Conference Fund, it is my pleasure to provide a report of my experience at the biennial conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) held at Wayne State University, Detroit, in June 2017. Over the span of 4 days and with up to 18 concurrent panels at any given time, the scholars, artists, activists, and poets who came together under the conference theme "Rust/Resistance: Works of Recovery" offered a thought-provoking *Wunderkammer* for anyone interested not only in the intersection between literature and science but also in a more fundamental engagement with what it means to speak about "nature," "culture," "technology," "the human," and that ubiquitous, yet elusive, notion of the "anthropocene." With a pronounced interest in science fiction and as the presenter of a paper on the British New Weird flagship author China Miéville, I had ample opportunities to explore and widen my academic horizon. Thematically, the conference was exceptionally diverse and yet provided a strong sense of unified purpose. It might not come as a surprise that, especially in view of recent U.S. American policy shifts, issues including climate change, eco-diversity, sustainable futures, and energy cultures were addressed with a heightened sense of urgency.

While the ground covered by the keynote lectures was inspiring, leading from an insightful reconsideration of Thoreau by Laura Dassow Walls, to an evocative poetry reading by National Book Award winner Ross Gay (*Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*, 2014), and Kyle Powys White's spirited talk "Resurgence from within the Rust: Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene," I would like to give credit to some of the literature and science related highlights I encountered in the panels I was fortunate to attend. At least two panels addressed

the meeting of ecological imaginaries and weird fiction: "Weird Ecology: Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* Trilogy and Environmental Resistance" and "The Many-Tentacled Present: Environmental Horror in Film, Literature, and Everyday Life." In the first, Anna Wilson approached the weird imbrication of landscape and agency in VanderMeer's fiction through the lens of an "alien-oriented ontology" and Laura Shackelford suggested a reading that combined posthumanism with a consideration of non-Euclidean geometry. In the second, Marcel O'Gorman took the aesthetics of H.P. Lovecraft as a starting point to revisit the distinction between (human) terror and (nonhuman) horror in light of a problematization of object-oriented-ontology, Isabelle Stengers's *In Catastrophic Times*, and Donna Haraway's "Tentacular Thinking," while, similarly, William Major elaborated on Haraway's invocation of the "Cthulucene." Certainly an exceptionally productive site for ecocritical reflections was found in the field of science fiction. Panels such as "*Dhalgren* and the Speculative City in the Post-Industrial Age," "Resistant Discourses and Strategies of Recovery: Exploring Gender and Environment in Science Fiction," and "Fictions of Climate Apocalypse" provided a forum for readings of Samuel Delany, J.G. Ballard, Margaret Atwood, Kim Stanley Robinson, Mary Shelley, Octavia Butler, the *Mad Max* Franchise, *Her*, *Ex Machina*, *Upstream Color*, *Soylent Green*, and *Wall-E* with the help of a conceptual toolbox that included queer criticism, the energy humanities, constructions of Edenic landscapes, spatialized subjectivities, zombie media, systems theory, and the post-industrial unconscious, to name but a few.

I left the 2017 ASLE conference with a strong sense that the relationship between human societies and the planetary ecology will continue to grow into an ever more pressing topos in interdisciplinary negotiations between the sciences and the humanities and that exciting trajectories will emerge especially with regard to the mobilization of environmental media studies (from Harold Innis, to Bruno Latour, and John Durham Peters), indigenous and postcolonial criticism, and the themes of oil and water.

It seems worth a note that ASLE provided a particularly conducive forum for the interaction among and appreciation of graduate and early career research. I attended a workshop entitled "Teaching Ecocriticism in

*The next deadline for applications for
the BSLS Postgraduate Conference
Fund is 1 September.*

*To be eligible, applicants must: (1) be
a member of the BSLS; (2) be a current
research student; and (3) be
presenting a paper at a conference
held after 1 October 2017.*

*See the [funding section](#) of our website
for further information.*

the Introductory Classroom” where we not only exchanged syllabi and reflected on the challenges and didactic methodologies of facilitating environmental awareness in a variety of cross-disciplinary courses, but also were able to give each other advice on how to draft an academic CV and highlight our skills for the job market. In a meeting with the ASLE graduate student representatives, we were furthermore encouraged to actively contribute to and shape the orientation of future conferences and enrol in the ASLE mentoring program, which matches graduate students with senior members to foster professional networking in the field. Apart from the professional content-related dialogues and discussions at the end of each panel, plenty of opportunities were provided for networking and social mingling - from a culture crawl in the neighbourhood of Wayne State University that featured art exhibitions, readings, and urban gardening projects, to a biking tour through downtown Detroit, a scientist-guided exploration of local water conservation areas, and a banquet at the impressive African-American History Museum (with one of the best-curated permanent exhibitions I have ever had the pleasure to visit). I was also pleased to learn that ASLE has a Canadian (ALECC) and a European (EASCLE) sister organization.

With a proverbial bag full of new insights, colleagues, and books to read, I am grateful to the British Society for Literature and Science for supporting this trip and I look forward to seeing innovative scholarship on ecocriticism become a fixture of our field on both side of the Atlantic and beyond.

*Moritz Ingwersen
Trent University, Ontario / University of Cologne*

GUT FEELING: DIGESTIVE HEALTH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CULTURE

This multi-disciplinary, international workshop was held at the University of Aberdeen on 26–27 May 2017 in association with the University’s Centre for History and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine. The twenty participants came from Australia, France, Norway the UK, and the US, and included postgraduate students, early- and mid-career researchers, established scholars, and a range of medical practitioners and clinical researchers. There was no plenary lecture as the event aimed to foster a close-knit, collaborative environment in which an intellectually ambitious yet highly focused programme of talks could act as a springboard for further work on the topic.

Five panels were held over the two days, examining digestion in relation to politics; medical history; emotions and spirituality; literature; and metaphor. Speakers focussed on digestive health in Australian, American, French, German, Italian and Norwegian history. Several key concepts ran through the papers, including the essential connections between body and mind; the complex relationships between civilization and health; and intersections between digestion and gender, identity, colonialism, political control, and ecology. Some of the issues discussed included the importance of distinguishing between literal and metaphorical digestion, and the problems which arise when the distinction is unclear; the negotiation between digestion and other cognate topics including hunger, consumption, and appetite; and the possibility of extending the inquiry into other directions including non-human digestion, post nineteenth-century perceptions, and digestion in eastern cultures. Delegate engagement was very high, and a network on this area of research will shortly be established. There was a strong sense that key forgotten concepts in the understanding of digestive health in this period could usefully be reconsidered by today’s medical community, such as the focus on an interconnected body (demonstrated in diagnoses of ‘neurasthenia gastrica’), or the strong emphasis on ‘the balanced body’ in bestselling health manuals. One of the aims of the network will be to articulate the valuable insights gained by studying the history of digestion and to engage in meaningful discussion with practitioners in this area including gastroenterologists and neurogastroenterologists. Plans are also currently underway to publish a volume of essays based on the conference papers.

Funding for this event was gratefully received from the British Society for Literature and Science; the Society for the Study of French History; the Society for French Studies; the University of Aberdeen School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture; the British Society for the History of Science; and the British Academy.

*Manon Mathias
University of Aberdeen*

RECENT BOOKS

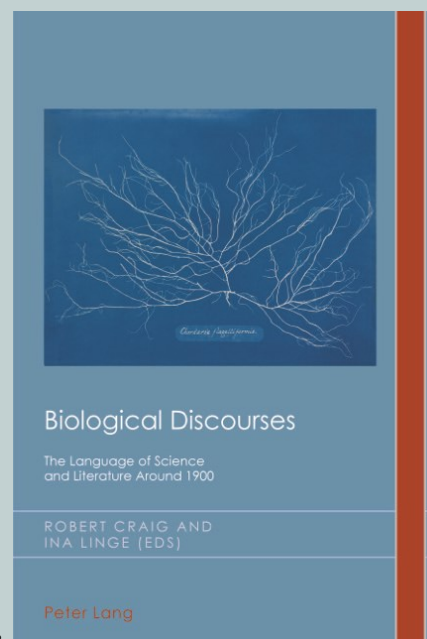
Robert Craig and Ina Linge, eds. *Biological Discourses: The Language of Science and Literature Around 1900*.

The relationship between biological thought and literature, and between science and culture, has long been an area of interest by no means confined to literary studies. The Darwin Anniversary celebrations of 2009 added to this tradition, inspiring a variety of new publications on the cultural reception of Darwin and Darwinism. With a fresh scope that includes but also reaches beyond the ‘Darwinian’ legacy, the essays in this volume explore the range and diversity of interactions between biological thought and literary writing in the period around 1900.

How did literature uniquely shape the constitution and communication of scientific ideas in the decades after Darwin? Did literary genres dangerously distort, or shed critical light upon, the biological theories with which they worked? And what were the ethical and social implications of those relationships? With these broad questions in mind, the contributors consider the biological embeddedness of human nature, perspectives on sexual desire, developments in racial thinking and its political exploitation, and poetic engagements with experimental psychology and zoology. They also range across different literary traditions, from Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands, to Britain and the USA. *Biological Discourses* provides a rich cross-section of the contested relationship between literature and biological thought in fin-de-siècle and modernist cultures.

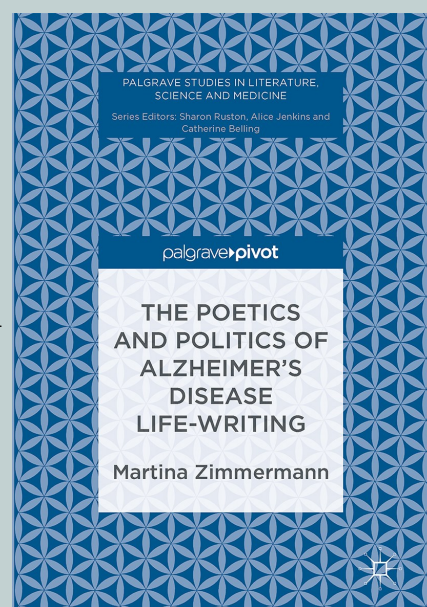
Robert Craig is Postdoctoral Teaching and Research Fellow at the University of Bamberg in Germany. He holds a PhD in German from the University of Cambridge. His doctoral thesis examined the dialectic of nature and self in the work of the modernist author Alfred Döblin (2016). He has also published articles on Günter Grass and on the philosophy of social networking technologies. His work has been funded by the AHRC and the DAAD.

Ina Linge is Associate Research Fellow in the Centre for Medical History at the University of Exeter. She holds a PhD in German from the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral thesis focused on the performance of queer livability in German sexological and psychoanalytic life writings, c.1900–1933 (2016). She has published articles on fin-de-siècle and modernist literature and culture, and the interdependence of sexology and autobiography. Her work has been funded by the AHRC, the MHRA, and the Wellcome Trust.



Martina Zimmermann. *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing*. The Literature, Science and Medicine series of the Palgrave imprint.

This is the first book-length exploration of the thoughts and experiences expressed by dementia patients in published narratives over the last thirty years. It contrasts third-person caregiver and first-person patient accounts from different languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish) and a range of media (memoirs, photo and picture books, films). It especially focuses on the poetical and political questions these narratives raise: what images do narrators appropriate; what narrative plot do they adapt; and how do they draw on established strategies of life-writing. It also analyses how these accounts engage with the culturally dominant dementia narrative that centres on dependence and passivity, and addresses how they relate to discourses of gender and aging. Linking literary scholarship to the medico-scientific understanding of dementia as a neurodegenerative condition, this book argues that, first, the articulations of patients must be made central to dementia discourse; and second, committed alleviation of caregiver burden through social support systems and altered healthcare policies requires significantly altered views about aging, dementia, and Alzheimer's patients.



Thanks to funding from the Wellcome Trust the book is open access and it can be downloaded free (as pdf or as e-book) from the publisher's page at: <https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783319443874>.

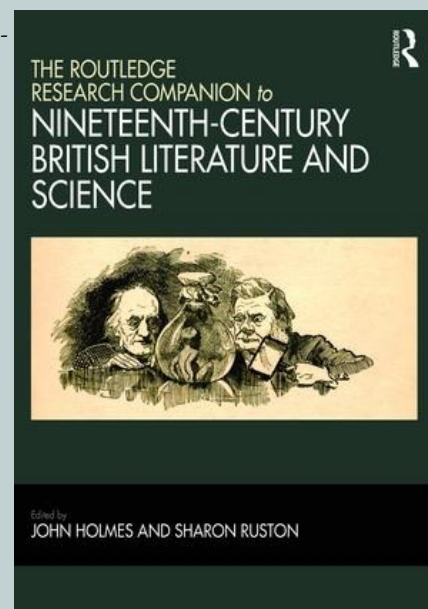
John Holmes and Sharon Ruston, eds. *The Routledge Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Science*

Tracing the continuities and trends in the complex relationship between literature and science in the long nineteenth century, this companion provides scholars with a comprehensive, authoritative and up-to-date foundation for research in this field. In intellectual, material and social terms, the transformation undergone by Western culture over the period was unprecedented. Many of these changes were grounded in the growth of science. Yet science was not a cultural monolith then any more than it is now, and its development was shaped by competing world views. To cover the full range of literary engagements with science in the nineteenth century, the companion consists of twenty-seven chapters by experts in the field, which explore crucial social and intellectual contexts for the interactions between literature and science, how science affected different genres of writing, and the importance of individual scientific disciplines and concepts within literary culture. Each chapter has its own extensive bibliography. The volume as a whole is rounded out with a synoptic introduction by the editors and an afterword by the historian of nineteenth-century science Bernard Lightman.

Contributors: David Amigoni, Suzy Anger, Debbie Bark, Michelle Boswell, Adelene Buckland, Gowan Dawson, Christine Ferguson, Peter Garratt, Barri Gold, Pamela Gossin, John Holmes, Alice Jenkins, Meegan Kennedy, Bernard Lightman, Andrew Mangham, Iwan Morus, Ralph O'Connor, Stella Pratt-Smith, Sadiyah Qureshi, Julia Reid, Adam Roberts, Sharon Ruston, Anna Katharina Schaffner, Charlotte Sleight, Jonathan Smith, Gregory Tate, Paul White and Martin Willis

John Holmes is Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham, UK.

Sharon Ruston is Professor of Romanticism at Lancaster University, UK.

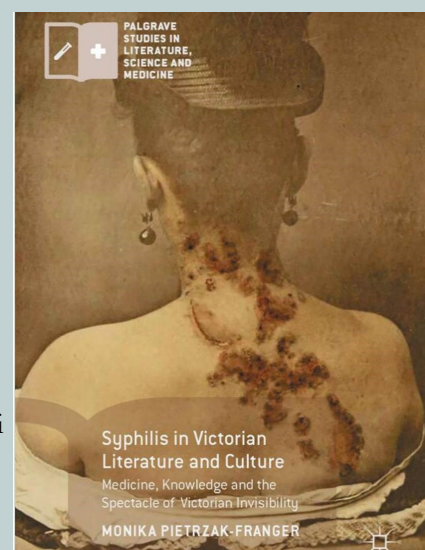


Monika Pietrzak-Franger. *Syphilis in Victorian Literature and Culture: Medicine, Knowledge and the Spectacle of Victorian Invisibility*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<https://www.palgrave.com/de/book/9783319495347#aboutBook>

The book addresses the evident but unexplored intertwining of visibility and invisibility in the discourses around syphilis. A rethinking of the disease with reference to its ambiguous status, and the ways of seeing that it generated, helps reconsider the network of socio-cultural and political interrelations which were negotiated through syphilis, thereby also raising larger questions about its function in the construction of individual, national and imperial identities. This book is the first large-scale interdisciplinary study of syphilis in late Victorian Britain whose significance lies in its unprecedented attention to the multimedia and multi-discursive evocations of syphilis. An examination of the heterogeneous sources that it offers, many of which have up to this point escaped critical attention, makes it possible to reveal the complex and poly-ideological reasons for the activation of syphilis imagery and its symbolic function in late Victorian culture.

Monika Pietrzak-Franger is currently Visiting Professor at the University of Hamburg, Germany and has published widely on Victorian and neo-Victorian studies, gender, medicine, visual culture and adaptation. She is the author of *The Male Body and Masculinity* (2007), editor of *Women, Beauty, and Fashion* (2014) and co-editor of *Neo-Victorianism and Globalisation* (2015), *Disease, Communication and the Ethics of (In)Visibility* (2014), and *Reflecting on Darwin* (2014).



UPCOMING EVENT

HUMPHRY DAVY: LAUGHING GAS, LITERATURE AND THE LAMP FREE ONLINE COURSE (MOOC)

Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829) is one of the best known men of science of the nineteenth century. He was the first person to inhale nitrous oxide, he isolated nine chemical elements, and he invented the miners' safety lamp known as the Davy lamp. This course will consider Davy's life and career using manuscript sources held at the Royal Institution of Great Britain. Starts 30th October (4 weeks duration, 3 hours per week). Sign up at: www.futurelearn.com/courses/humphry-davy

NEW PHD

Fani Cettl. "Mapping Human-Nonhuman Biopolitics in Classic Gothic Science Fiction"

Fani Cettl has successfully completed her PhD in June 2017, at the Central European University, in Budapest, Hungary. Navigating through the science and politics of/around the classic novels, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, and *The War of the Worlds*, this thesis proposes that the discourse of 'Gothic science fiction' is the key mode of modern biopolitics to delineate hierarchical relations between humans and nonhumans: on the one hand, by asserting human exceptional value and agency, and on the other, by challenging human exceptionalism. In turn, the novels are read as early articulations of the issues around animal ethics and environmentalism.

BLSL AND ACCUTE

COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE: MUSEUMS, SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY, AND LITERATURE ORGANIZERS: JOHN HOLMES, JANINE ROGERS, AND SOPHIE THOMAS

This trans-Atlantic, 2-panel event paired a panel at the British Society of Literature and Science (BSLS) in Bristol in April 2017 with a roundtable at the annual conference of the Association of Community College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) at the Congress of Learned Societies in Toronto in May 2017.

In response to the enthusiastic audience engagement at the BSLS-Sponsored panel "Museums, Collections, and Memory Objects: Literary Intersections" in Calgary last year, the organizers of that panel are teamed up with the British Society for Literature and Science (BSLS) to discuss the interdisciplinary opportunities of joining literary studies with the history of collection, museumship practice, and scientific inquiry. We wanted to extend beyond the usual temporal, geographical and discursive structures of conference panels by linking two different panels at two different conferences through online media resources, and by developing a discussion format that included both humanities academics and museum administrators, and that also creates a space for significant audience participation.

The first event at the BSLS presented 4 papers that intersected literary/textual analysis with museum studies, material studies, and the intellectual histories of science. The BSLS presenters explained how their work engages, challenges, and is challenged by, methodologies that combine historicist literary, artistic, and architectural practices. The four papers were recorded and posted online after the

BSLS conference: ACCUTE members watched the online recordings, and at the ACCUTE roundtable, each of the BSLS papers was assigned a respondent. The hope was that creating more space for audience discussion in both panels will support the development of international and interdisciplinary communities of literature, museumship, and science.

The discussions were lively and informative, and while of course there were some technical challenges, the joint panels presented opportunities to the two communities to connect in new ways. We are optimistic that we can build on this endeavor with new projects and collaborations.

The presenters at the BSLS panel were: **Verity Burke**, Doctoral Candidate in English, University of Reading, "The Intermedial Museum in the Nineteenth Century"; **John Holmes**, Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture, University of Birmingham, Poetry and Architecture in the Natural History Museum"; **Janine Rogers**, Professor of Medieval and Sixteenth-Century Literature, Mount Allison University, "Cultural History as a Resource for Science Museumship and Outreach"; **Sophie Thomas**, Associate Professor of English Literature, Ryerson University, "The House-Museums of John Hunter and John Soane (a comparative anatomy)"

The respondents on the ACCUTE panel were: **Ailsa Barry**, Vice President / Vice-présidente, Experience and Engagement / Expérience et engagement, Canadian Museum of Nature / Musée canadien de la nature; **Rebecca Dolgoy**, SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in Cultural Memory, University of Ottawa; **Mark Engstrom**, Deputy Director, Collections & Research, Royal Ontario Museum; **Marc André Fortin**, Assistant Professor, English Literature and Comparative Literature, Département des lettres et communications, Université de Sherbrooke.