



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

*Dr Greg Lynall (University of Liverpool), Chair; Dr Michael Whitworth (Merton College), Treasurer;
Dr Josie Gill (University of Bristol), Communications Officer; Dr Emily Alder (Edinburgh Napier University), Membership Secretary;
Dr Franziška Kohlt (Brasenose College) Book Reviews Editor.*
*Members at Large: Dr Chisomo Kalinga (University of Edinburgh); Dr Ros Powell (University of Bristol);
Early Career Member at Large: Ros Ambler-Alderman (University of Southampton);
Overseas Representatives: Dr Maria Avxentevskaya (Max Planck Institute) Europe;
Dr Jenni Halpin (Savannah State University), North America, Newsletter Editor.*

EARLY-CAREER SCHOLAR ESSAY PRIZE, 2018

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE / *JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND SCIENCE*

We are delighted to announce that the British Society for Literature and Science and *Journal of Literature and Science* prize for an essay by an early-career scholar has been won by Lara Choksey for her essay "Peripheral Adaptation: Living with Climate Change in Doris Lessing's *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*".

We offer our congratulations to Lara for what the judges agreed was a striking and original essay. The essay will be published in the next available issue of *JLS*, and its author will also receive a prize of £100.

The judging panel wrote: "This year's prize-winning essay offers a fascinating reading of Lessing's *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*. It convincingly argues that the novel responds to the post-war neoimperial governance of decolonised African

nations through its depiction of a genetically engineered labour force of Planet 8ers, in what amounts to a science fictional representation of the imperial invention of race. Choksey skilfully reads the novel through the lens of epigenetic science, bringing that science into conversation with global political debates about race, capitalism, decolonisation and development. Persuasively contending that Lessing explores the potential of biologically different modes of living in an era of ecological crisis and racist exploitation, Choksey's essay offers an important and timely contribution to the work of undoing the epistemological and psychological effects of imperial rule, and in so doing opens up new vistas for the study of literature and science".

We would like to thank all the BSLS members who submitted essays for this year's prize. As usual, we were delighted by the high standard of the submissions we received and thoroughly enjoyed reading all of them.

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

Autumn 2018 Newsletter

PHD AWARDED

Kanta Dihal defended in January 2018 her DPhil thesis at the University of Oxford, titled 'The Stories of Quantum Physics: Quantum Physics in Literature and Popular Science, 1900-present' (supervisors: Professor Sally Shuttleworth and Dr Michael H. Whitworth). Her research investigates narrative framings of quantum physics in fiction and nonfiction, covering the disciplines of literature and science, science fiction studies, and science communication.

MEMBER ENGAGEMENTS

LITERATURE AND SCIENCE RESEARCH PROJECT 'GLOBAL AI NARRATIVES' AWARDED MAJOR GRANT FROM THE TEMPLETON WORLD CHARITY FOUNDATION

BSLS member Dr Kanta Dihal has been awarded a major research grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation to fund the [Global AI Narratives project](#) (GAIN) based at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (University of Cambridge), with Dr Stephen Cave, Dr Sarah Dillon, and Dr Beth Singler. The project aims:

- to understand how different cultures and regions perceive the risks and benefits of AI, and the narrative influences that are shaping those perceptions;
- to foster new thinking about AI around the world by disseminating and promoting science fiction and nonfiction narratives about AI from underrepresented regions and groups;
- to connect local academic experts on perceptions and communication of AI with each other, and with writers and artists around the world.

The Global AI Narratives (GAIN) project builds on the work of the AI Narratives project (a 2017 joint initiative of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence and the Royal Society) which has been exploring the lack of diversity in contemporary AI narratives, and the ways in which the dominant narratives create a limited vision of the future of AI. These limitations include: a focus on anthropomorphised robots, which distracts from the reality of the technology; representation of a narrow demographic; and excessive polarising, which distorts public policy debates. The main output from the AI Narratives project will be published by Oxford University Press in 2020: *AI Narratives: A History of Imaginative Thinking About Intelligent Machines*, edited by Stephen Cave, Kanta Dihal and Sarah Dillon.

GAIN will run from 2018 to 2021. The project will identify alternative narratives to those currently informing high-level international public discourse and AI policy, by engaging a wide range of academics and artists from regions outside the Anglophone West through a series of ten global workshops. These collaborations will foster underrepresented voices that are currently absent from global AI debates. The first two workshops took place at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and Waseda University, Tokyo, in September 2018. The next workshop will take place in India in Spring 2019.



RECENT OUTREACH EVENTS

The researchers on the AI Narratives project at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge, have been bringing literature and science research to a wide range of audiences outside academia. The following are a few highlights from the past months:

In July 2018, the AI Narratives project was given its own programme slot at CogX, an artificial intelligence festival that attracted 6500 attendees, mainly from industry. Dr Sarah Dillon chaired the session, which contained a keynote from Dr Stephen Cave and Dr Kanta Dihal, a panel on diversifying the current corpus of AI narratives, and a workshop on mitigating AI hype. The panel discussion can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m7CqxQcl4A>

At the World Summit AI in Amsterdam (October 2018), Dr Stephen Cave and Dr Kanta Dihal gave a keynote titled 'AI Narratives and Gender', in which they traced the gendering of AI in fiction to its problematic applications in contemporary technology.

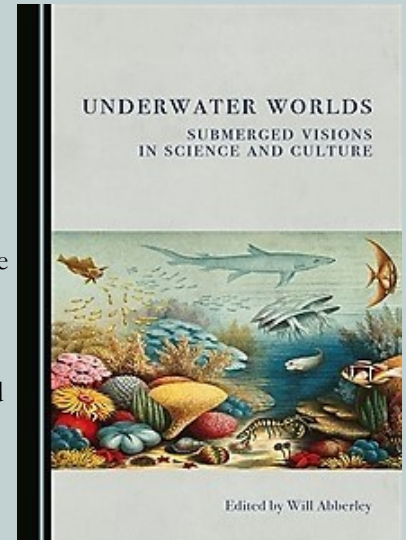
Dr Kanta Dihal gave a TEDx talk in Thessaloniki on her research, titled 'Is the robot rebellion inevitable?' The talk can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDq6I_-FOYY



RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Underwater Worlds: Submerged Visions in Science and Culture, ed. Will Abberley (Cambridge Scholars, 2018).

Underwater Worlds throws open a new area in the emerging field of “blue” environmental humanities by exploring how subaqueous environments have been imagined and represented across cultures and media. The collection pursues this theme through various disciplinary perspectives and methodologies, including history, literary and film criticism, myth studies, legal studies and the history of art. The essays suggest that, since the nineteenth century, technologies of underwater exploration have generated novel sensory experiences that have destabilized conventional modes of representation and influenced new aesthetic forms from fiction and television to virtual reality. The collection also examines how representations of underwater environments have reflected and critiqued humans’ relationships with marine ecology and life-forms. It reflects on the deeper cultural and symbolic resonances of mythical figures such as mermaids, sea monsters and the ghosts of drowned seafarers. The contributions further reveal myriad political, ideological, gendered and racial dimensions of representing underwater environments. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/underwater-worlds>



Helena Ifill. *Creating Character: Theories of Nature and Nurture in Victorian Sensation Fiction* (Manchester UP, 2018).

This book explores the ways in which the two leading sensation authors of the 1860s, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins, engaged with nineteenth-century ideas about personality formation and the extent to which it can be influenced either by the subject or by others. Innovative readings of seven sensation novels explore how they employ and challenge Victorian theories of heredity, degeneration, inherent constitution, education, upbringing and social circumstance. Far from presenting a reductive depiction of 'nature' versus 'nurture', Braddon and Collins show the creation of character to be a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Drawing on material ranging from medical textbooks, to sociological treatises, to popular periodicals, *Creating character* shows how sensation authors situated themselves at the intersections of established and developing, conservative and radical, learned and sensationalist thought about how identity could be made and modified. <http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781784995133/>

CALLS FOR PAPERS

“CORRODING THE NOW: POETRY + SCIENCE|SF”

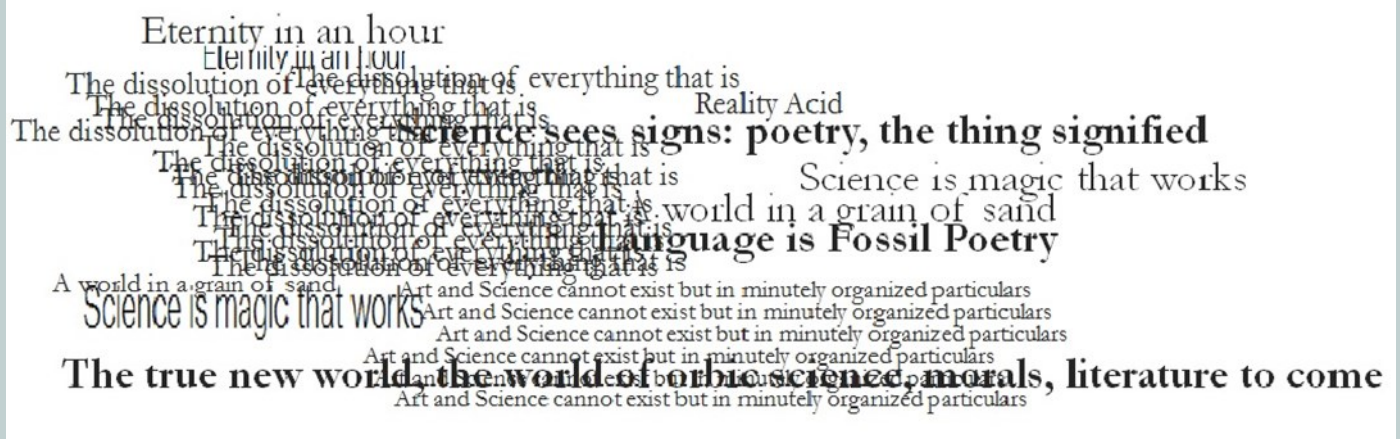
CONFERENCE. EGHAM, SURREY. APRIL 12-13, 2019.

<http://corrodingthenow.com/>

The world we inhabit is framed, driven, (re)produced, and conceptualised by and through science. Science as a mode of knowing contours the prevailing episteme, whilst technological innovation continues to remake work and leisure experience. At the same time, society is both reflected and in turn formed by science fiction (SF): as contributor to the nostalgia economy, as a dominant visual-commercial aesthetic, as a mimetic index of the present's utopian and dystopian tendencies. The now is a time of extreme precarity. We face a raft of catastrophes – political, socioeconomic, and, most pressingly, ecological. And yet, even as our own survival comes into question, capitalism itself seems unassailable, primed to outlast ‘humanity.’

Poetry, perhaps, offers a mode of thinking and writing outside of what we already know. Although in many instances relegated to the status of niche hobby or confined to the manufactured radical space of the academy, it contains the possibility of genuine alterity: correction, articulation, derangement, experiment. This conference proposes to investigate the web formed between poetry, science, and SF. Each of these is both implicated in the now and also potential disruption of it. Our technomodal reality is shaped by scientific reason and innovation, yet at the same time predicated on the uneven distribution of knowledge and technology. SF risks critical impotence given its tendency to rearticulate a world which already resembles a futuristic dystopia. An insufficiently corrosive poetics slides into irrelevance.

Rather than seeking to reclaim each of these modes, this conference proposes an intensification of the chaos and energy formed by their interconnection. Its goal is open process; speculative poetics as a mode of thinking, a technique, a creative reading (and writing) strategy, a hack: science, SF, and innovative poetry.



Possible topics and area of enquiry include, but are not limited to, the following:

Speculation. How will the poetry of the immediate future address the concerns and ideas of science and SF? What new, unknown poetics can we produce, create, or conceptualise?

Praxis. What critical, creative or activist possibilities are opened up by the act of writing, reading, or performing such poetics? How can we bring theoretical and hermeneutic reactions to such texts to bear upon material reality?

Minute Particulars. Where and how do science and/or SF appear in contemporary poetics? Is there a difference between the poetry of science and the poetry of SF? In what other forms of science and SF writing might we find poetry?

andscape. What are the worlds, and ways of worlding, enabled by SF poetry and/or poetry & science? How do these modify our conception of 'the world,' or of episteme?

Liminals. In what ways do such poetics slide between categories or genres? In what ways do these characteristics modify or question our hermeneutic approaches?

The I/Eye. What approaches to selfhood, identity, and (post)human subjectivity arise via speculative poetics? How might questions of race and post-colonialism be addressed through a scientific or SF poetics?

Utopia – Heterotopia – Dystopia. To what extent, and in what ways, do intersections of poetry, science, and/or SF seek to correct society's flaws? What types of community or [X-]topian imagination do they give rise to?

Histories. What are the precursor texts and techniques to today's science and SF poetry and poetics? Are there undervalued oeuvres that might be brought to light today?

Derangement. What are the formal and linguistic properties of scientific and/or SF poetry, and how do they differ from those of other poetic modes?

World. How might we connect Ecopoetics and/or Zoopoetics with an SF poetics? In what ways does such poetry respond to ecocritical discourses, to Petromodernity and/or the Anthropocene?

Things. What conceptions of ontology or phenomena do SF poetry and/or poetry & science explore? What are the things (or thingynesses) of speculative poetics?

&c. Space. The Weird. Pataphysics. OuLiPo. Cyborg Poetics. Speculative Realism. Scifaiku. Binary Poetry. Machine-Produced Poetry. Alternate History. &c.

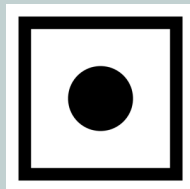
We are interested in academic papers and panels, creative responses, poetry readings and performances. We welcome scholars, poets, critics, scientists, science fiction writers, students, and all others. We are also interested in submissions of A2 size posters featuring critical, creative and other work. These will be on display for the duration of the conference. Poster submissions from PGR students will be given priority over those from other sources.

For individual papers, responses, or performances, please send proposals of up to 300 words. For multiple participant formats (e.g. discussion panels, group readings, etc.), proposals may be up to 500 words long. Posters should be sent in both high res (300+ DPI) jpeg and pdf formats. Both posters and proposals should be accompanied by 50 word participant bios. All submissions should be sent to SFpoetics@gmail.com by 14th January 2019. Applicants will receive a response by 4th February 2019. Inquiries in the meantime should be addressed to francis.gene-rowe.2016@live.rhul.ac.uk.

Confirmed conference guests include: Alex Goody (Oxford Brookes University), Laura Watts (University of Edinburgh), Melinda Gebbie, Allen Fisher, and Iain Sinclair.

“Corroding the Now” is co-hosted by Royal Holloway, University of London, University of Surrey, and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The organising committee includes: Francis Gene-Rowe, Stephen Mooney, Richard Parker, Adam Roberts, Christos Callow Jr., Sarah Kelly, Melissa Addey, Edwin Evans-Thirlwell, Jonathan Taylor, Claudia Davidson, Eleanor March, Yen Ooi, Ahmed Honeini.

PULSE: THE JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND CULTURE VOLUME 6



THE ALTERNATE REALITIES OF LIFE SCIENCES AND SCIENCE FICTION From Dr Moreau's 'Island' to 'Area X'

In recent decades, the genre of science fiction has increasingly turned to explorations of biology as the science of the future, and focused prominently on the issues of biotechnology, genetic engineering, or climate change, while biology itself has been undergoing a shift from the focus on individual genes to epigenetics and systems biology, and most recently quantum biology. Life sciences and science fiction have been productively crossing paths ever since their 19th century emergence and throughout the 20th century, as can be found in M. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, A. Huxley's *Brave New World*, or H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Contemporary science fiction articulates new reinterpretations of the familiar question of what constitutes life and how to design and manage it, for example in the TV series *The Expanse*, based on James S. A. Corey's novels, with the so-called 'protomolecule', an extraterrestrial virus and a potential bio-weapon at its centre, or VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, a story of alternative evolution that gives life to entities that blur the boundaries between life and death, organic and inorganic, biological and artificial, earthly and alien.

What are some of the more particular ways in which life sciences and science fiction productively intersect, mutually illuminate or even transform one another? One powerful intersecting thread is that of highlighting the dangers inherent in the discoveries and technologies of life sciences, and the anxieties at the prospect of irreversible evolutionary and environmental change. At the same time, the scientific horizon of discovery and change also opens up for visions of new, perhaps more democratic, potentialities, and alternate realities. How do these science / fictional utopias and dystopias narrate the developments in reproductive technologies, artificial intelligence, digital reality, or environmental change, and many more? How do science / fictions question the established boundaries and paradigms of life sciences? What are some of the political implications of the science / fictional construction and management of living beings, of the science / fictional alternate realities?

In the next issue of *Pulse* we aim to collect papers with a contemporary take on alternate realities, be it utopian, dystopian or otherwise, created by interventions and developments in the life sciences, and staged in both historical and contemporary sci-fi, including film, TV series and other formats besides literature. How do alternate realities of life sciences and science fiction intersect with and transform one another, and in the process both reactivate and redraw some of the genre conventions? We are especially interested in the explorations of animal life, plant life, evolution, environment, the human and the nonhuman, biotechnology, reproduction, digital reality and artificial intelligence which come out of the more recent critical theories and scholarly approaches. Perspectives ranging from literary and cultural studies to science studies, philosophy, sociology and history of science are welcome.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- alternative evolution
- bioweapons in 21st ct. warfare
- biomedicine and biochemistry
- scientific utopia and dystopia
- science fiction and ecofeminism
- technologies of gender and sexuality
- reproductive technologies
- science fiction and climate change
- animal life, plant life
- life and digital reality
- artificial intelligence and neuroscience
- shamanism and ecology
- the human and the non- or post-human
- life and the quantum field
- biopolitics and bioethics

References:

Slonczewski, Joan and Michael Levy: "Science fiction and the life sciences" In: *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.

Submission Deadline: 20 December 2018 -

We welcome the submission of **full articles** (5000-6000 words) on these and related themes. We also publish **book reviews** (800-1000 words); please get in touch if there is a book you would like to review.

All articles should be prepared for blind review including the removal of authorship from the document file information. Submissions should include a cover sheet in a separately attached document containing: the paper title and short abstract (ca. 250 words) author's name, affiliation, word count (including footnotes & references), and contact information. Article and cover sheet should be submitted in a .doc, .docx, or .odt (or similar open-source) file format. PDF submissions are also accepted but previously stated file formats are preferred where possible.

All articles and related material should be submitted to: submissions.pulse@gmail.com

For any inquires please feel free to contact us at pulse.scistudies@gmail.com Please do not submit articles to this email address. For general information and to access previous issues of *Pulse* you can visit:

Central and Eastern Europe Online Library: <https://www.cceol.com/search/journal-detail?id=2187>

Website: <https://pulsejournal.wordpress.com/>

ISSUU: <https://issuu.com/pulse.scistudies>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/pulse.scistudies>

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE 4-6 APRIL 2019 ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



(Photo credit: Mike Wainwright)

The fourteenth annual conference of the British Society for Literature and Science will take place at Royal Holloway, University of London, from Thursday 4 April until Saturday 6 April 2019. Keynote speakers will include Professor Tim Armstrong (Royal Holloway) and Professor Angelique Richardson (Exeter).

The BSLS invites proposals for 20-minute papers, panels of three papers, or special roundtables on any subjects within the field of science, and literatures in the broadest sense, including theatre, film, and television. There is no special theme for this conference, but abstracts or panels exploring one of the following topics are especially welcome:

- (1) how the literatures of Africa, the Americas, Asia, or Australasia address, interact with, or respond to the discourses of science;
- (2) the digital humanities;
- (3) the writing, reading, and interpretation of human nature; and
- (4) innovative or progressive models for uniting the sciences and the humanities.

In addition, we are hoping to put together sessions with looser, non-traditional formats, and would welcome proposals from any person or persons interested in making presentations of approximately ten minutes from notes rather than completed papers. The hope is that this format will encourage longer Q&A sessions with more discussion.

Please send an abstract (200 words) and short biographical note (50 words) to the conference organiser, Dr. Mike Wainwright, mike.wainwright@rhul.ac.uk, by no later than 18.00 GMT, Friday 7 December 2018. Include the abstract and biographical note in the body of the email.

All proposers of a paper or panel will receive notification of the results by the end of January 2019.

The conference fee will be waived for two graduate students in exchange for written reports on the conference, to be published in the BSLS Newsletter. If you are interested in being selected for one of these awards, please mention this when sending in your proposal. To qualify you will need to be registered for a postgraduate degree at the time of the conference.

Information concerning onsite accommodation and local hotels will be forthcoming.

Membership: conference delegates will need to register/renew as members of the BSLS (annual membership: £25 waged/ £10 unwaged).