



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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BSLS GRANTS

THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF SIR HUMPHRY DAVY

I would like to thank the BSLS for awarding *The Collected Letters of Sir Humphry Davy* a small grant in October 2017 to assist with the cost of reproducing images in the edition. The grant from the BSLS paid specifically for images reproduced from the British Library and Tyne and Wear Archives and comprised a number of important sketches Davy included in his letters, such as illustrations for the production of his miners' safety lamp. These images show that Davy continued to develop the lamp even after his initial, important decision to use wire gauze. The edition is to be published in 2019 in four, print volumes and contains fully annotated transcriptions of Davy's correspondence (much previously unpublished) with such figures as André-Marie Ampère, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Michael Faraday, Lord Liverpool, Hans Ørsted, Sir Robert Peel, Mary Somerville, and William Wordsworth.

*Sharon Ruston
Lancaster University*

RADCLYFFE HALL SYMPOSIUM

90 years ago, on 27th July 1928, Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* was first published in the UK. The book was famously banned as obscene in Britain due to its lesbian content. To mark this anniversary and to reflect on Hall's life, work and legacies, Dr Elizabeth English (Cardiff Metropolitan University), Dr Sarah Parker (Loughborough University) and Dr Jana Funke (University of Exeter) organised a one-day symposium at Birkbeck, University of London, on 27th July 2018. The event brought together international scholars and included a panel on Hall's engagement with sexual science, generously sponsored by the BSLS. The aim of the panel was to reconsider how Hall used sexual scientific concepts in *The Well of Loneliness*, a book that was published with a preface by British sexologist Havelock Ellis. The panel comprised of three papers that examined different aspects of Hall's negotiation of scientific ideas in *The Well of Loneliness*: Holly James Johnston (University College, London) explored how Hall's use of the sexological concept of sexual inversion in the novel opens up non-binary possibilities of gender identification. Dr Jennifer Mitchell (Union College, New York) investigated Hall's engagement with sexological conceptualisations of masochism. Dr David Shackleton (University of Exeter) concluded the panel with a comparative reading of Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Olive Moore's *Spleen* (1930), arguing that both authors drew on sexual scientific ideas and articulated a common project of queer ecology. At the end of the panel, all three speakers reflected on the ways in which Hall and other modernist authors engaged with scientific understandings of the natural and the normal and how they negotiated the sexological concept of the sexual type. The organisers and speakers are very grateful to the BSLS for supporting the symposium.

*Jana Funke
University of Exeter*

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

Summer 2018 Newsletter

FRANKENSTEIN @ 200

2018 INTERNATIONAL

HEALTH HUMANITIES CONSORTIUM CONFERENCE

The 2018 International Health Humanities Consortium Conference took place at Stanford University from April 20-22nd. This was the fourth conference organised by the Health Humanities Consortium since it was founded in 2015 with the aim of promoting scholarship that explores the intersection of the arts and humanities with health, illness and healthcare practices.

This year's conference, enticingly titled 'Frankenstein@200', celebrated the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* by dissecting the text as a study of medically-based ethical dilemmas and exploring its relevance to the moral medical imagination today. The fertile afterlife of Shelley's text – rich in retellings and reinterpretations – attracted scholars from around the world working in fields as diverse as comparative literature, clinical ethics, disability studies and anesthesiology. This spectrum of specialities generated rich cross-fertilisations in which theoretical considerations of the mythologies and metaphors manifest in the story of Frankenstein were brought into conversation with practical discussions of public policy, arts therapy and new technologies emerging in medical practice.

The extensive programme included four keynote speakers. On the first day Alexander Nemerov (Stanford University) opened the conference with a meditation on the melancholic afterlives of historic murder victims and the ways in which researchers participate in this melancholia as a mode of commemoration while Lester Friedman (Hobart and William Smith Colleges) performed an impressively intricate genealogical study of the 'Frankenstein family tree' in film, for which he received a standing ovation. Alvan Ikoku (Stanford University) read Shelley's text as an exercise of ethical education via narrative exchange and Catherine Belling (Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University) concluded the plenary sessions by playfully reflecting on the 'scarily proliferate meaning making of *Frankenstein*' which might at once be conducive to healthy epiphanies while also risk inducing a state of psychotic apophony – the perception of connections between unrelated things – amongst readers.

An array of plenary panels, poster displays, flash presentations, concurrent sessions and special performances developed these themes, germinating questions around ethnic representations in the *Frankenstein* corpus, temporalities of death, constructions of disability in professional and personal narratives, the birthing of literary bioethics, genetic mappings of humanity, and the metaphors instrumental to medical epistemologies. My own paper 'What's-its-name?: The Politics of Naming in post-2003 Iraq' explored how the problems and politics of naming articulated in Shelley's original *Frankenstein* translated – culturally and linguistically – into the ethics of recording and representing civilian casualties within Iraq in a recent remoulding of the story by Ahmed Saadawi entitled *Frankishtayn ji Baghdad* (2013; Frankenstein in Baghdad). This was constructively placed in dialogue with papers examining *Frankenstein* as a model for fractured relationships of love that exist in cases of domestic violence in Bengal by Amrapali Maitra (Stanford University) and moral explorations of Nazi medical experimentation by Robert Allinson (Soka University of America) and Lilia Popova (Stanford University). Presenting my research in this setting made clear the continuing relevance of moral questions raised by Shelley's text to unexpected political contexts beyond the setting of my own research.

Alongside academic papers there was an impressive choice of interactive 'breakout' sessions in which participants could work on pieces of creative writing, mould their own faces out of clay and attend the 'Hippocrates Café' to hear live musical performances relating to the Frankenstein story. I attended a breakout session titled 'The Spark of Life in Modern Medicine: Who's the Monster?' delivered by David M. Gaba, the Associate Dean for Immersive and Simulation-based learning at Stanford School of Medicine who addressed the clinical issues of putting patients into various states of 'suspended animation' and how simulated human beings can be used when teaching medical students. As part of this session we were led into a simulated operating theatre to 'meet' a medical mannequin equipped with a simulated heartbeat, pulse and voice – it even blinked! This was an unsettling introduction to the beings that dwell in the 'uncanny valley' alongside Frankenstein's creature.

Outside of the formal conference schedule, the event was accompanied by the exhibition 'Betray the Secret: Humanity in the Age of "Frankenstein"' at Stanford University's Cantor Arts Centre, which included paintings, sketches and photographs of the human body and human interactions with technology. This forms one feature of a yearlong arts festival celebrating the literary and scientific legacies of *Frankenstein*.

I would like to thank The British Society for Literature and Science for facilitating my attendance of this amazing event held in Stanford's cutting-edge campus in Silicon Valley. The conference profoundly shifted my understanding not only of *Frankenstein*, but also medical humanities as a field. It also offered an inspiring example of a truly interdisciplinary and interactive event. The whole experience will feed into the body of my research in all kind of creative ways.

Annie Webster

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Conti, Meredith. *Playing Sick: Performances of Illness in the Age of Victorian Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2018). <https://www.routledge.com/Playing-Sick-Performances-of-Illness-in-the-Age-of-Victorian-Medicine/Conti/p/book/9781138703117>

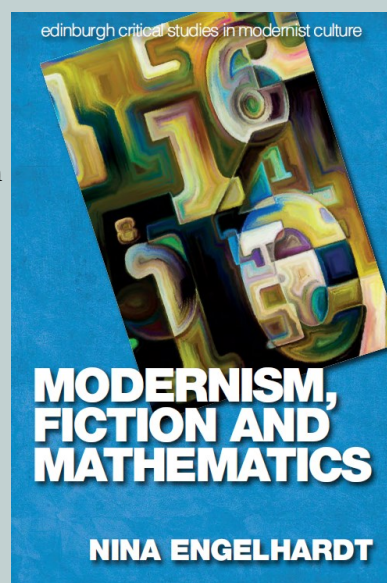
This book reconstructs how actors embodied three of the era's most provocative illnesses: tuberculosis, drug addiction, and mental illness. In placing performances of illness within wider medicocultural contexts, Meredith Conti analyzes how such depictions confirmed or resisted salient constructions of diseases and the diseased. Conti's case studies, which range from Eleonora Duse's portrayal of the consumptive courtesan Marguerite Gautier to Henry Irving's performance of senile dementia in *King Lear*, help to illuminate the interdependence of medical science and theatre in constructing nineteenth-century illness narratives in Britain and the United States. Through reconstructing these performances, Conti isolates from the period's acting practices a lexicon of embodied illness: a flexible set of physical and vocal techniques that performers employed to theatricalize the sick body. In an age when medical science encouraged a gradual decentering of the patient from their own diagnosis and treatment, late nineteenth-century performances of illness symbolically restored the sick to positions of visibility and consequence.

Donner, Mathiew. "Open to me. Maybe I Can Help": Networked Consciousness and Ethical Subjectivity in Octavia E. Butler's *Mind of My Mind*.' in *Posthumanism in Young Adult Fiction: Finding Humanity in a Posthuman World*. Anita Tarr and Donna R. White (eds.). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018. 304 pages. ISBN: 9781496816696. \$70.00 (aprox. £50.00).

Focusing on Octavia Butler's novel, *Mind of My Mind*, this chapter explores the relation Butler weaves between new technologies, adolescence, and ethical responsibility. Reading the novel alongside critical theories on the limits of the mind and their implication for our understanding of the self and its place in the world, it argues that through the coming-of-age story of her protagonist, Butler invites a re-conceptualization of subjectivity understood not as an individual quest for uniqueness but as an ethical awakening to the presence, both outside and at the core of the self, of an irreducible and infinite form of alterity. Exploring the individual and collective impact of communication, Butler exposes the vulnerability at the heart of the subject as well as the performative, fluid and inherently protean dimension of the human, thus challenging the relevance and necessity of its post- incarnation and re-framing it instead as yet another source of epistemological violence.

Engelhardt, Nina. *Modernism, Fiction and Mathematics* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

The book explores the unique place of mathematics in literature and science studies, as well as providing new perspectives on central questions in and beyond literary modernism. It examines the idea of a mathematical modernism by drawing on prose texts by mathematicians and on historical and cultural studies of maths, and analyses major novels that employ developments in mathematics as exemplary of wider modernist movements. Works by Thomas Pynchon, Hermann Broch, and Robert Musil accord maths and its modernist transformation a central place in their visions and introduce its relations with political, linguistic, epistemological, and ethical developments. Not least, the texts explore the freedoms and opportunities that the so-called 'foundational crisis of mathematics' implies and relate the emerging notion of 'fictional' characteristics of maths to the possibilities of literature. The monograph opens up new frames of analysis that help understand the modernist condition from the interdisciplinary perspective of literature and mathematics studies, and it demonstrates the need for more careful consideration of the unique status of mathematics in the field of literature and science studies, particularly when the specific characteristics of maths gain attention with its modernist transformation.

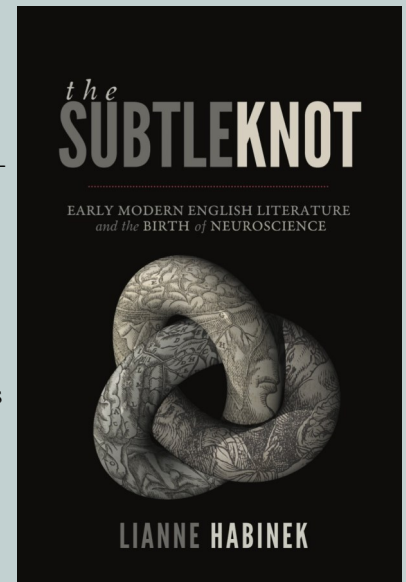


Habinek, Lianne. *The Subtle Knot: Early Modern English Literature and the Birth of Neuroscience*. McGill-Queen's University Press, June 2018. http://www.mqup.ca/subtle-knot--the-products-9780773553187.php?page_id=46&

In the early modern period, poetic form underpinned and influenced scientific progress. The language and imagery of seventeenth-century writers and natural philosophers reveal how the age-old struggle between body and soul led to the brain's emergence as a curiosity in its own right.

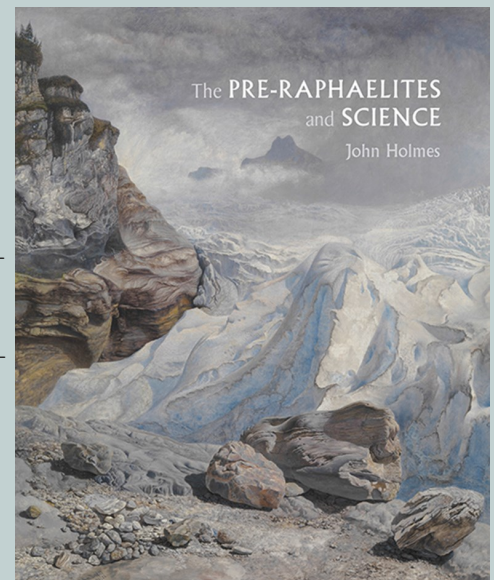
Investigating the intersection of the humanities and sciences in the works of authors ranging from William Shakespeare and John Donne to William Harvey, Margaret Cavendish, and Johann Remmelin, Lianne Habinek tells how early modernity came to view the brain not simply as grey matter but as a wealth of other wondrous possibilities - a book in which to read the soul's writing, a black box to be violently unlocked, a womb to nourish intellectual conception, a creative engine, a subtle knot that traps the soul and thereby makes us human. For seventeenth-century thinkers, she argues, these comparisons were not simply casual metaphors but integral to early ideas about brain function.

Demonstrating how the disparate fields of neuroscientific history and literary studies converged, *The Subtle Knot* tells the story of how the mind came to be identified with the brain.



Holmes, John. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science*. Yale University Press.

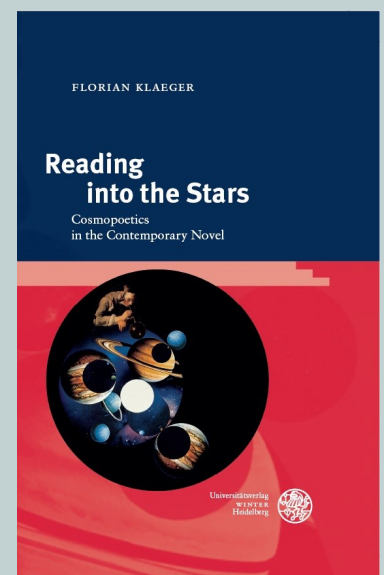
In their manifesto, *The Germ*, the Pre-Raphaelites committed themselves to creating a new kind of art modelled on science, in which precise observation could lead to discoveries about nature and humanity. John Holmes's new book traces how the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their close associates put scientific principles into practice across their painting, poetry and sculpture. Victorian scientists and Pre-Raphaelite artists worked together to design and decorate natural history museums which would be temples to God's creation, while journals like *Nature* and the *Fortnightly Review* combined natural science with Pre-Raphaelite art theory and poetry to find meaning and coherence within a worldview turned upside down by Darwin's theory of evolution. Offering reinterpretations of well-known works by John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, and William Morris, this major reevaluation of the popular Victorian movement also considers less-familiar artists who were no less central to the Pre-Raphaelite project.



Yale University Press is offering the recipients of the BSLs newsletter a special price of £30.00 for *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science* (RRP £35.00) when purchased from www.yalebooks.co.uk. Enter promo code Y1847 at the checkout stage of your order. Free P&P, UK orders only. Offer ends 30-09-18

Klaeger, Florian. *Reading into the Stars. Cosmopoetics in the Contemporary Novel* (Heidelberg: Winter, 31 July 2018, 479 pages)

(Mis-)readings of the stars and our place in the cosmos have long been used as a metaphor for reading fictional worlds: to speak of 'reading into the stars' is to acknowledge that the stargazer instills the otherwise empty sidereal text with meaning of their own making. By contrasting this activity with novel-reading, the trope of astro-eisegesis raises questions about the nature, potential, and functions of fiction. This amounts to a self-reflexive cosmopoetics of the novel employed by authors such as Martin Amis, John Banville, Andrew Crumey, Zadie Smith, and Jeanette Winterson, among many others. Tracing the development of the trope in narrative fictions since Chaucer and its uses in British and Irish novels since the Apollo moon landings, the book explores the epistemological, ontological and anthropological dimensions of novelistic cosmopoetics.



UPCOMING

LIFE ITSELF IN THEORY AND PRACTICE NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY NETWORK AT THE OXFORD RESEARCH CENTRE IN THE HUMANITIES (TORCH), OXFORD. LAUNCHING OCTOBER 2018

“Life Itself in Theory and Practice” aims to explore the concept of “life itself” in both philosophical, theoretical, and cultural discourses and the concrete practices of scientific research, through a series of seminars and talks from invited speakers. What are the stakes of life in the 21st century? Who has the authority to delineate the boundaries of life? How is life distinguished from non-life? And how might we conceive of life as something radically distinct from the idea of the human? Stressing dialogue between the humanities and sciences, “Life Itself in Theory and Practice” problematises the increasingly entangled relationship between literature, theory, and culture and developments in genetics, biotechnology, and information technology.

Convenors:

Sam Gormley; Dr. Kitty Wheater; James Matharu; Madeleine Chalmers

Expressions of interest and enquiries: life.itself@torch.ox.ac.uk

THE 2019 BSLS CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD AT ROYAL HOLLOWAY.

Further information will be forthcoming.
(Photo credit: Mike Wainwright)



JLS/BSLS ESSAY PRIZE

Following the success of the *JLS*/BSLS essay prize in previous years, The *JLS* and the British Society for Literature and Science would like to announce the 2018 prize for the best new essay by an early career scholar on a topic within the field of literature and science.

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 5pm on **Friday 31st August 2018**.

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/>).

The prize will be judged jointly by representatives of the BSLS and *JLS*. The winning essay will be announced on the BSLS website and published in the *JLS*. The winner will also receive a prize of £100.

Read previous prize winning essays in the *JLS*: www.literatureandscience.org