



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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2020 WINTER SYMPOSIUM

The executive committee is delighted to announce that the 2020 Winter Symposium will be going ahead online on and around Saturday 28 November, hosted by the Universities of Aberdeen and Sheffield. As members will be aware, the 2020 annual conference—originally scheduled for the University of Sheffield—was held online, and about a third of the original speakers adapted their papers into asynchronous talks, with a live keynote from Professor Martin Willis. The BSLS executive committee held an extraordinary meeting in June and decided that the 2020 Winter Symposium should serve as an opportunity for the remaining Sheffield-scheduled speakers to deliver their papers. Dr Katherine Ebury (Sheffield) and Dr Helena Ifill (Aberdeen), the organisers of the cancelled Sheffield conference, have generously agreed to host the online Winter Symposium jointly between their two institutions and have arranged a full day of symposium events based on Sheffield papers not delivered online in April. Katherine and Helena will make announcements about the symposium in due course, but please put 28 November in your diaries!

BSLS GRANTS

LITSCIPOD SERIES 2

The second series of *LitSciPod: The Literature and Science Podcast* continues the work we began in the first series of engaging a more general audience in ideas, research, and projects from the field of literature and science. However, as the scale of global pandemic became apparent, this work became more important, as the intersection between literature and science offers an

important and unique response to and, indeed, respite from COVID-19.

We were incredibly fortunate to receive a BSLS small grant to aid the travel expenses incurred by running LitSciPod. We are committing to interviewing in-person where possible, as this produces the best quality of interview. We had intended travel to

- the Science Museum (London), to interview scholars working on modernist science and collaborating with museums
- Cardiff University, to interview scholars working on *ScienceHumanities*,
- the University of Glasgow, to interview scholars working on the relationships between literature, science, medicine and maths, and
- the University of Strathclyde, to interview scholars working on nineteenth-century working class engagement with literary and scientific ideas

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

Summer 2020 Newsletter

However, plans changed. Our last in-person interview happened in Oxford, and as such we have used but little of our travel expenses funding (though Catherine is still extremely grateful of the train fare!).

The switch to interviewing remotely rather than in person may have put certain interviews on hold for the foreseeable future, but it has enabled the scope of the podcast to become more international and to feature guest scholars from the US (Dr Kari Nixon) and Canada (Dr Robert Engen). This has widened our listening audience and gained a greater North American awareness of the UK research happening in literature and science and vice versa. Ever keen to highlight the relevance of literature and science research, Series 2 makes more of the links between literature, science, and medicine, as well as the overlap for some scholarship between literature and science and medical humanities.

Undeterred by the pandemic, the second series of *LitSciPod* has dropped five episodes thus far. In this series, we go further into both literary and scientific history; interviewing features early modernist Dr Olivia Smith (University of Oxford) and Romanticist Prof Sharon Ruston (Lancaster University). Our commitment to showcasing younger scholars has continued with interviewing Dr Emilie Taylor-Pirie, who—since our interview—has found out she has been awarded a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship for a research project on Ronald Ross.

Follow @LitSciPod on Twitter and listen to both series [here!](#)

—Catherine Charwood

BSLS FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Applications are regularly invited for the BSLS Small Grants Scheme and the BSLS Postgraduate and Early Career Conference Fund.

THE BSLS SMALL GRANTS SCHEME offers grants of up to £400 to promote the study of literature and science. We are open to all sorts of proposals with the exception of those that request support for individual personal conference expenses. Examples of activities for which the awards might be used are expenses for a visiting speaker, a seminar series, or a symposium. Applications for support to stage special BSLS panels at appropriate conferences (other than the BSLS 2021 conference) will be considered. The next deadline for applications is expected in early autumn.

THE BSLS POSTGRADUATE AND EARLY CAREER CONFERENCE FUND offers bursaries of up to £200 for BSLS postgraduate student members and early career researchers who are not in permanent posts and are ineligible for institutional funding. Bursaries may be used towards the cost of presenting research papers at conferences.

For details of eligibility and how to apply for either of these funds, please see the Funding page on the website.

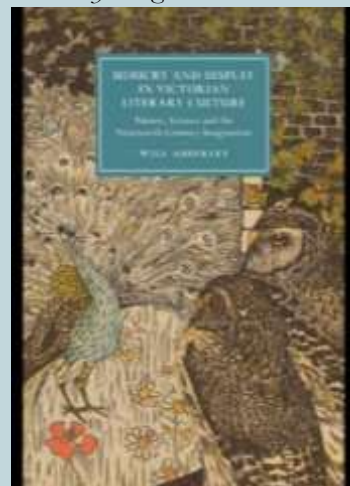
For queries about the Small Grants Scheme please contact Rosalind Powell (rosalind.powell@bristol.ac.uk).

For queries about the Postgraduate and Early Career Conference Fund, please contact Rachel Murray (R.E.Murray@lboro.ac.uk).

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Will Abberley, *Mimicry and Display in Victorian Literary Culture: Nature, Science and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*. Cambridge UP, 2020.

Revealing the web of mutual influences between nineteenth-century scientific and cultural discourses of appearance, *Mimicry and Display in Victorian Literary Culture* argues that Victorian science and culture biologized appearance, reimagining imitation, concealment and self-presentation as evolutionary adaptations. Exploring how studies of animal crypsis and visibility drew on artistic theory and techniques to reconceptualise nature as a realm of signs and interpretation, Abberley shows that, in turn, this science complicated religious views of nature as a text of divine meanings, inspiring literary authors to rethink human appearances and perceptions through a Darwinian lens. Providing fresh insights into writers from Alfred Russel Wallace and Thomas Hardy to Oscar Wilde and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Abberley reveals how the biology of appearance generated new understandings of deception, identity, and creativity; reacted upon narrative forms such as crime fiction and the pastoral; and infused the rhetoric of cultural criticism and political activism.

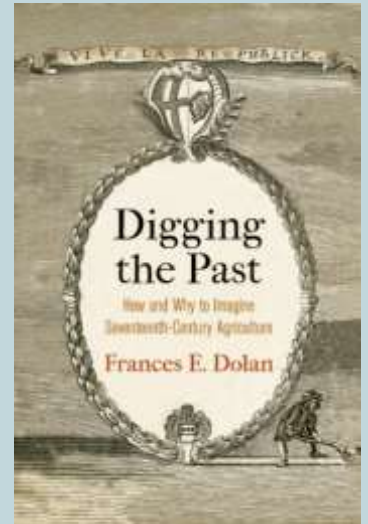


Daniel Cordle, 'This Is What Happened the Morning the First Atomic Bomb Created a New World'. *The Conversation*, 15 July 2020. <https://theconversation.com/this-is-what-happened-the-morning-the-first-atomic-bomb-created-a-new-world-142184>

This article marks the 75th anniversary of the Trinity atomic test on 16 July. It reflects on the reactions of eyewitnesses to the test, and its depiction in literature and culture, discussing how the experience is mediated through traditions of the sublime and deeply rooted mythological archetypes.

Frances E. Dolan, *Digging the Past: How and Why to Imagine Seventeenth-Century Agriculture*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2020. Available in hard cover and e-book.

Building on and connecting histories of food and work, literary criticism of the pastoral and georgic, histories of elite and vernacular science, and histories of reading and writing practices, among other areas of inquiry, *Digging the Past* offers fine-grained case studies of projects heralded as innovations in the seventeenth century and today: composting and soil amendment, local food, natural wine, and hedgerows. Dolan analyzes the stories seventeenth-century writers told one another in letters, diaries, and notebooks, in huge botanical catalogs and flimsy pamphlets, in plays, poems, and how-to guides, in adages and epics. She digs deeply to assess precisely how and with what effects key terms, figurations, and stories galvanized early modern imaginations and reappear, often unrecognized, on the websites and in the tour scripts of farms and vineyards today.



Sean Fitzgerald, 'Encouraging Discussion of Science and Technology Futures through Practice-Led Research'. *Anthropocenes – Human, Inhuman, Posthuman*, 1.1 (2020): 9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/ahip.13>

With the practice paper, I present a full copy of an original speculative fiction that examines an imagined physical creation of a synthetic-organic hybrid that could signal the end of the Anthropocene. The speculative fiction, 'NUCA: Beginnings *in vivo*', is set against the environments of genetic manipulation and synthetic biology, as well as the ambition to design a non-natural gene-selecting intelligence to rival the four-billion-year experiment that has produced twenty-first century *Homo sapiens*. The context, ideas, and practice-led research are delivered through the fiction, along with an accompanying short film, *NUCA: Next Universal Common Ancestor*.

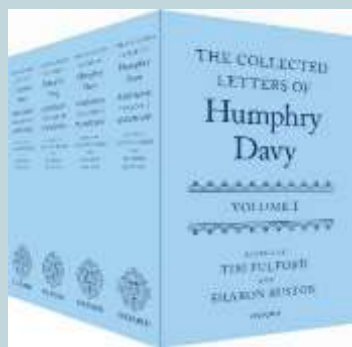


Sean Fitzgerald. 'Writing Science-as-Fiction to Examine Practice-Led Research in Creative Writing as Science Communication'. *Writing in Practice: The Journal of Creative Writing Research*, vol.6 (2020): pp. 81-98. <https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/current-wip-edition-2/editions/vol.-6.html>

I consider the intersection between science communication and creative writing, seeking to outline how practice-led research provided the methodological focus for a recently completed doctoral study in creative writing as science communication. A selection of the findings is presented within this review document to offer a flavour of the processes involved and the approaches taken, delivered together with excerpts of creative practice, to illustrate how the critical element combines with the creative to produce a practice-led research outcome.



The Collected Letters of Sir Humphry Davy, ed. Tim Fulford and Sharon Ruston, 4 vols. Oxford UP, 2020.



Oxford University Press has just published *The Collected Letters of Sir Humphry Davy*, ed. Tim Fulford and Sharon Ruston with the assistance of Andrew Lacey. Eleven years in the making, this is the first scholarly edition of the correspondence of a man many literary critics know as the friend of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Scott. He was regarded by Ampere as the greatest chemist ever, having used the Voltaic pile to decompose substances and reveal new elements—including potassium, sodium, chlorine, and iodine—demonstrating the forces that hold matter together to be electrochemical. He experimented with nitrous oxide, designed a mine safety lamp, and became the most charismatic lecturer of the era. He knew James Watt, Josiah Wedgwood, Erasmus Darwin, John Dalton, Henry Mackenzie, Henry Cavendish,

Joseph Banks, William Godwin, Byron, De Stael, Amelia Opie, Caroline Herschel, and Mary Somerville. His proteges were Michael Faraday and John Herschel. He wrote a lot of poetry—mostly landscape verse influenced by his intimate knowledge of Wordsworth's, Southey's, and Coleridge's poems.

All these facets of a man of science who was widely seen as the embodiment of genius are reflected in the edition, which comprises four volumes including an introduction, comprehensive annotations, biographies of salient people, and a glossary of chemical terms. It's expensive, as scholarly editions are, but we hope you'll ask your libraries to buy it, and then enjoy the new perspectives that it gives you. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-collected-letters-of-sir-humphry-davy-9780198705864?cc=gb&lang=en&>



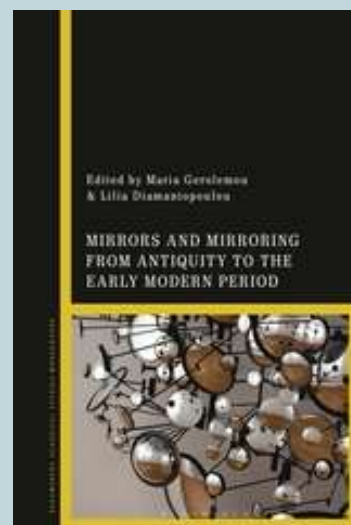
Mirrors and Mirroring from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period, ed. Maria Gerolemou and Lilia Diamantopoulou. Bloomsbury, January 2020.

This volume examines mirrors and mirroring through a series of multidisciplinary essays, especially focusing on the intersection between technological and cultural dynamics of mirrors. The international scholars brought together here explore critical questions around the mirror as artefact and the phenomenon of mirroring.

Beside the common visual registration of an action or inaction, in a two dimensional and reversed form, various types of mirrors often possess special abilities which can produce a distorted picture of reality, serving in this way both illusion and falsehood. Part I looks at a selection of theory from ancient writers, demonstrating the concern to explore these same questions in antiquity. Part II considers the role reflections can play in forming ideas of gender and identity. Beyond the everyday, we see in Part III how oracular mirrors and magical mirrors reveal the invisible divine—prosthetics that allow us to look where the eye cannot reach. Finally, Part IV considers mirrors' roles in displaying the visible and invisible in antiquity and since.

Maria Gerolemou, 'Plane and Curved Mirrors in Classical Antiquity', in *Mirrors and Mirroring*.

In classical antiquity two kind of mirrors prevail: the plane, shiny mirror produces in a great extent real images and is employed in contexts where the produced double of an image serves as paradigm that could be imitated or avoided. On the other hand, curved mirrors could deform reality, create an image from scratch, and/or even completely delete the reflected object. By demonstrating such skills curved mirrors are closer to the casual idea attached generally to mirrors; that is, mirrors could disclose things that cannot be seen with human eyes, like the divine or the secrets of nature. In other words, while plane mirrors reproduce an almost clear picture of the sensed object, spherical mirrors by departing from the target of naturalistic verisimilitude are free to go beyond the area of origins; hence, plane and curved mirrors are loaded with meanings related to mimesis and catoptric animation respectively. By studying the iconopoetic effectiveness of Greek and Roman mirrors, the chapter takes also into consideration, on the one hand, their general properties, that is, their transportability, their ability to produce an image quickly and without labour, and, on the other hand, their distinct characteristics depicted in catoptrical texts, that is, the type of curvature they have, the materials from which are made, and their physical condition (if they are dim or shiny).



MEMBER ENGAGEMENTS

SYMBIOSIS

BLS members have been working with several leading museums to launch a new network to promote and develop arts projects and humanities research within museums with natural history collections. Symbiosis began as a partnership between the University of Birmingham and Mount Allison University in Canada and the natural history museums in Berlin, Vienna, and Oxford, along with the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. We have just launched a new website for the network (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/symbiosis/index.aspx>), so



people can see the collaborations we have been involved in and the projects we have been working on. Symbiosis is an open network and anyone is welcome to get involved. Please contact us through the website if you are interested in hearing more about our projects and events or if you would like to suggest new partnerships or collaborations.

—John Holmes, Janine Rogers, and Will Tattersdill

TECHNOLOGICAL ANIMATION IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY 6-7 DECEMBER 2019

At the Department of Classics and Ancient History of the University of Exeter, and supported by the A.G. Leventis Foundation, Maria Gerole mou convened a conference on “Technological Animation in Classical Antiquity.” The conference brought together scholars working on the living/moving artifact from the fields of ancient technology, philosophy, archaeology and art. It focused on technical objects such as articulated statuettes, and ancient automata of various types, and the experience that they might offer. Specifically, speakers were asking how technological and material realities of moving artifacts shaped the idea of animation and vice-versa.

<http://sites.exeter.ac.uk/techanimation/>

—Maria Gerole mou
University of Exeter



ní Mbeallaigh (left), Nevin (centre), and Love (right)

CALLS

VICTORIAN MATERIALISMS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *EJES* PROPOSALS BY 30 NOVEMBER 2020

Guest editors: Ursula Kluwick (University of Bern), Ariane de Waal (MLU Halle-Wittenberg)

Matter ineluctably matters; it composes, decomposes, and recomposes the bodies and environments we inhabit. New materialist ideas surrounding the vitality (Jane Bennett), symplectis (Donna Haraway), and intra-actions (Karen Barad) of matter have paved intriguing pathways for literary and cultural analysis. Yet the notion that matter is in motion, rather than inert, and that humans are entangled in dense webs of responsive and partly also agential materials is not a new one. Victorian microscopists, chemists, botanists, physicists, geologists, physiologists, and novelists diligently dissected the material structures of chemical substances, plants, animals, atoms, subterranean strata, and human bodies. In the process, they not only developed precise tools and terminologies to quantify and describe matter, but concomitantly questioned the taxonomies that differentiated human from nonhuman entities.

Victorian scholars have responded productively to the new materialist turn. Yet in the wake of Asa Briggs's influential *Victorian Things* (1988), studies have tended to maintain an ontological distinction between Victorian 'people' and 'things.' While there is a wealth of scholarship on even the most inconspicuous Victorian objects, and while virtually all human body parts and organs have come under critical scrutiny, the co-constitution of human and nonhuman materials remains somewhat underexplored. However, as this special issue argues, Victorian interrogations of the boundaries between human and nonhuman as well as active and passive matter anticipate new materialist approaches. Hence, they invite us to reconsider relationships between nineteenth-century and contemporary conceptualisations of materiality.

This special issue has two objectives: first, it aims to investigate a broad array of Victorian materialities, with a special focus on the conceptual and physical entanglements between human, animal, plant, chemical, biotic, and inorganic matter in scientific, popular, and literary texts. Second, the issue seeks to trace continuities and intersections between Victorian and new materialisms while also exploring critical avenues that this dialogue might generate within the wider field of English Studies.

The editors invite proposals that examine the non/human materialities of Victorian literature, photography, art, or artefacts from matter-oriented perspectives alongside theoretical- methodological discussions of Victorian materialisms. Approaches that question and expand the conventional rubrics of Victorian Studies are especially welcome. Potential topics could include yet are not limited to the following areas:

- **NATURAL HISTORY:** overlapping taxonomies of plant/animal/human species; vitalism;
- **THE ENVIRONMENT:** matter in Victorian ecology and energy science; non/human response-abilities; thinking beyond anthropocentrism;
- **MEDICINE:** anatomical, pathological, and healthy matter and its motions; the interplay of human and nonhuman microorganisms and parasites;
- **CHEMISTRY:** interactions between chemical and literary/poetic transformations of matter;
- **PHYSICS:** the physics of matter and the "physics of character" (Brilmyer 2015);
- **AESTHETICS:** representations of material assemblages and the vibrancy of matter; specific literary modes and representational strategies for the expression of material agency.

Detailed proposals (up to 1,000 words) for full essays (7,500 words), as well as a short biography (max. 100 words) should be sent to the editors by 30 November 2020: Ursula Kluwick (ursula.kluwick@ens.unibe.ch), Ariane de Waal (ariane.de-waal@anglistik.uni-halle.de)

See https://think.taylorandfrancis.com/special_issues/european-journal-of-english-studies-victorian-materialisms/ for a description of the submissions and review processes.

SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES
ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION FOR POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF OLDENBURG, 13-15 MAY 2021

Conference Organizers: Anton Kirchhofer (anton.kirchhofer@uni-oldenburg.de), Karsten Levihn-Kutzler (karsten.levihn-kutzler@uni-oldenburg.de)

Science is at the heart of some of the most vexing questions facing postcolonial studies today: think, for instance, about the role of science in struggles for environmental justice, in postcolonial responses to the debate about the concept of the Anthropocene, in cultural and political responses to pandemics from HIV/AIDS to the coronavirus, or in the imagination of postcolonial futures in contemporary science fiction. Science—itself a heterogeneous set of concepts, practices, settings, and knowledges—often occupies a profoundly contradictory position in such debates: it may be referenced, all at once, as cause of environmental degradation, as medium of diagnosis, and as remedy; it is historically connected to histories of colonial oppression but also to the promises of post-independence modernism; it has sometimes been co-opted by parochial nationalism, yet science education also promises improvement and emancipation for marginalized and disenfranchised people.

Since the late 1980s, science and technology studies (STS) have critically interrogated the (self-) image of science as a unified practice—universal, objective, and culturally neutral. From the acrimonious opposition of science and cultural studies during the “science wars” of the 1990s, recent scholarship has moved to more nuanced understandings of the entanglements of science and its cultural contexts. Where early proponents of postcolonial STS concentrated on rehabilitating indigenous knowledge vis-à-vis “Western” science, more recent approaches have questioned this dualistic opposition and instead argued for a critical geography of scientific production.

Yet the cultural imagination of this connection has rarely been made a focus of research. This is true for the incisive research in the social sciences and anthropology on the ambivalent relation of science and postcolonial modernities, as well as for the burgeoning debate about literature and science in literary criticism, which has often retained a focus on European and American texts. While genres such as postcolonial science fiction and Afrofuturism have already been recognized in this context, the range and variety in which the nexus of science and culture is addressed and represented in postcolonial narratives across the anglophone world remains underexplored.

Against this background, the conference seeks to facilitate conversations on science and culture in postcolonial contexts that bring together different disciplinary perspectives such as postcolonial literary scholarship, science and technology studies, literature and science studies, history and philosophy of science, and the environmental humanities. This critical reflection will provide new perspectives on themes and debates such as postcolonial science fiction, the Anthropocene, new materialism, bio-colonialism, and global disparities in scientific mobility. We encourage a broad understanding of ‘postcolonial narratives’ and invite contributions that explore entanglements of science, literature and culture across different genres and media forms, including literature, film and other visual media, and public discourse.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Representations of the role of science in social/political conflicts:
 - Questions of environmental justice
 - The corona-crisis, HIV/AIDS, and other pandemics and public health crises
 - Biotechnology/bioprospecting/biopiracy
 - Nuclear (weapons) technology; nuclear testing, waste, and resource extraction
 - Class/caste conflicts over science education
 - Science, colonialism and neo-colonialism
 - Science, culture, and religion
 - Science and the global economy
- Roles and relations of the sciences and the humanities in the Anthropocene debate
- English as “the language of science”
- Postcolonial and transcultural perspectives on science education
- Science and culture in the EFL-classroom
- Science and nationalist movements
- Colonies as “laboratories of modernity” (Paul Rabinow)
- Narrating knowledge practices in different historical and cultural settings
- Science, narrative, and indigenous knowledges
- Postcolonial perspectives on the “globalization of knowledge”
- Postcolonial technoscience and biopolitics
- Postcolonial perspectives in/on the medical humanities
- Professional and intellectual migration, global disparities of knowledge production
- Scientist characters in postcolonial fiction
- Postcolonial science fiction, Afrofuturism
- Historical fiction, (postcolonial) revisions/rewritings of the history of science

Please submit abstracts by December 31, 2020. For submission guidelines and all further details, please check the conference website: <https://gaps2021.uol.de/>

2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The executive committee has decided to move the 2021 annual conference online, observing the original dates (8-10 April 2021). The annual conference at Edinburgh Napier will take place in 2023 (with the Manchester conference as scheduled for 2022). The 2021 conference will be organized by the executive committee; further details will be communicated with the CFP in the autumn.

FUTURE BSLS CONFERENCES

The Society welcomes early conversations with members interested in hosting upcoming annual conferences. Please contact the chair, Greg Lynall.

BSLS 16, ONLINE, 8-10 APRIL 2021

BSLS 17, MANCHESTER, 7-9 APRIL 2022

BSLS 18, EDINBURGH NAPIER, 6-8 APRIL 2023