



The British Society for
LITERATURE
and **SCIENCE**

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ON DECOLONIALITY IN LITERATURE AND SCIENCE BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM 2021

20 NOVEMBER 2021

ZOOM AND WONDER

REGISTER BY MONDAY 15 NOVEMBER

Featuring a keynote lecture by Dr Josie Gill (University of Bristol) and a roundtable with Dr Chisomo Kalinga (University of Edinburgh), Dr Manali Karmakar (Vellore Institute of Technology), and Dr Sandeep Bakshi (University of Paris), this year's Symposium will take place on Saturday 20 November online. Please register via the [Eventbrite page](#) by Monday 15 November.

The programme begins at 10.00 GMT and includes grants and publishing talks as well as a group discussion ('What Kinds of Examples of Decolonial Practice Have You Seen in the Academy, or Want to See?') and a reading group (Priyamvada Gopal's 'On Decolonisation and the University' and Michell Chresfield and Josie Gill's 'Race and Antiracism in Science and the Humanities'). We will conclude with a social at 17.00.

Our symposia have become PGR- and ECR-centred and -led events. We encourage events with a 'non-conference' feel and eagerly welcome proposals from postgraduates and from early career researchers who were recently postgraduates.

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

Autumn 2021 Newsletter

The BSLS Newsletter is published quarterly in February, May, August, and November,
with submissions deadlines typically the last Friday of the preceding month.

Editor: Jenni Halpin

bsls.ac.uk

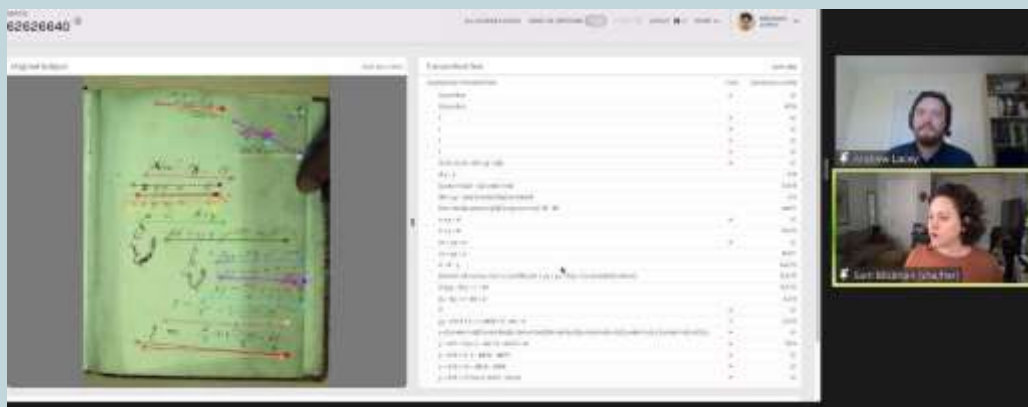
MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

DAVY NOTEBOOKS PROJECT TRANSCRIBE-A-THON

The Davy Notebooks Project is crowdsourcing transcriptions of all of Sir Humphry Davy's 75-strong collection of notebooks, using Zooniverse, which describes itself as the world's largest and most popular platform for people-powered research. We currently have over 1375 volunteers.

On 4 August this year we held our first ever transcribe-a-thon, with 36 participants from all over the world. It was a real privilege to finally 'meet' and engage with some of our transcribers.

The afternoon event included two hands-on transcriptions tasks focusing on two notebooks held at the Royal Institution: RI MS HD/21/B and 22/A. There was a Q&A with Professor Sharon Ruston and Dr Alexis Wolf, as well as discussions in break-out rooms followed by a group discussion at the end. The event was logged live on Twitter and there was a book prize for the three best tweets, prompting seven of our volunteers to tweet about us for the very first time.



Zooniverse's Dr Sam Bäckhan, with Dr Andrew Lacey, demonstrating ALICE, the app created by Zooniverse to collate and edit the results of transcription projects on the platform.



Notebook RI MS HD/21/B

We transcribed 15% of 21B and 4% of 22A (a longer notebook). By 5pm UK time, when the transcribe-a-thon ended, we had gathered 329 classifications on Zooniverse for 4 August 2021 (1 classification = 1 transcribed and submitted line of text by an individual volunteer). With the exception of the days surrounding the project launch, this is the highest number of classifications we've ever had on a single day. (A usual day has about 100 classifications.)

We also had lots of stimulating discussion over the course of the event, taking in: the difficulties inherent in transcribing Davy's hand, and especially the mathematical notation in notebook 21B; Davy's relationship with his brother, John Davy; Davy's (sometimes idiosyncratic) use of

punctuation; differences between nineteenth-century and present-day handwriting and typography; Davy's habit of sketching in his notebooks; and more.

Many thanks again to our wonderful transcribers. It has been gratifying to hear that our attendees found the event a great opportunity to meet the project team and provide feedback and suggestions for the project. They told us they enjoyed the chance to learn more about Davy and nineteenth-century handwriting and to have the feeling of working as part of a community, and that being able to meet fellow transcribers and the team made the project feel more like the collaboration that it is.



Notebook RI MS HD/22/A



Professor Sharon Ruston and Dr Alexis Wolf in the O&A

—Eleanor Bird,
Research Associate, Davy Notebooks Project
and
Andrew Lacey,
Senior Research Associate, Davy Notebooks Project

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Patrick Armstrong, 'Going through the motions: natural science and movement in Samuel Beckett's trilogy', *Textual Practice* (2021)

Open access:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1971286>

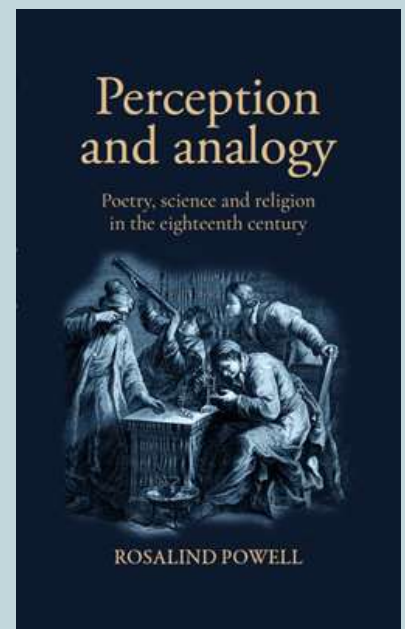
This article argues that scientific language and theory, combined with Samuel Beckett's study of philosophy, helps to shape the representations of movement patterns in his post-war trilogy of novels. Taking its cue from Beckett's engagement with scientific writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this article explores the physical and imperceptible forces that complicate the movements of characters in his prose fiction. The advances in quantum physics, which resonated with Beckett's attraction to both ancient atomism and the seventeenth-century 'Natural Science Period' of philosophy, inform his prose style and structural principles. By making use of newly available material, including archival research, I show that the terminology of natural science frequently reverberates through his writing, especially in his peculiar descriptions of moving bodies. I suggest that, for Beckett, the artistic process becomes a contraction, reducing motion to its fundamental terms in an attempt to understand the processes that underpin it. Movement, nonetheless, remains unpredictable, ceaseless, and technically difficult to represent.



Rosalind Powell, *Perception and Analogy: Poetry, Science, and Religion in the Eighteenth Century*. Manchester UP, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-5261-5704-1

<https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781526157041/>

Perception and Analogy explores ways of seeing scientifically in the eighteenth century. The book examines how sensory experience is conceptualised during the period, drawing novel connections between treatments of perception as an embodied phenomenon and the creative methods employed by natural philosophers. Covering a wealth of literary, theological, and pedagogical texts that engage with astronomy, optics, ophthalmology, and the body, it argues for the significance of analogies for conceptualising and explaining new scientific ideas. As well as identifying their use in religious and topographical poetry, the book addresses how analogies are visible in material culture through objects such as orreries, camera obscuras, and aeolian harps. It makes the vital claim that scientific concepts become intertwined with Christian discourse through reinterpretations of origins and signs, the scope of the created universe, and the limits of embodied knowledge.



FUTURE BSLs CONFERENCES

The Society eagerly invites conversations with members interested in hosting upcoming annual conferences. Please contact the chair, Jenni Halpin.

BSLs 17, MANCHESTER, 7-9 APRIL 2022

BSLs 18, EDINBURGH NAPIER, 6-8 APRIL 2023

bsls.ac.uk

Sharon Ruston, *The Science of Life and Death in Frankenstein*. Bodleian Library Publishing, 2021. ISBN: 9781851245574

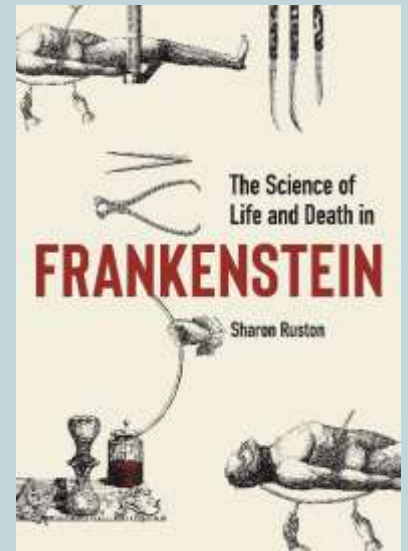
What is life?

This was a question of particular concern for Mary Shelley and her contemporaries. But how did she, and her fellow Romantic writers, incorporate this debate into their work, and how much were they influenced by contemporary science, medicine, and personal loss?

The Science of Life and Death in Frankenstein is the first book to bring together the many scientific and medical attempts to account for life and death in Mary Shelley's time. In it, Sharon Ruston considers what Shelley's contemporaries thought of air, blood, sunlight, electricity, and other elements believed to be the most essential for life.

Mary Shelley's (and her circle's) knowledge of science and medicine is carefully examined and her novel is placed in the context of other Romantic-period writings on life and death. A number of key scientific and medical thinkers are considered in the book, including John Abernethy, James Curry, Humphry Davy, John Hunter, William Lawrence, and Joseph Priestley, as well as some organizations, such as the Royal Humane Society. Ruston explores the contemporary scientific basis behind Victor Frankenstein's idea that life and death were merely 'ideal bounds' he could transgress in the making of the Creature.

Interweaving images of the manuscript, portraits, medical instruments and contemporary diagrams into her narrative, Sharon Ruston shows how this extraordinary tale is steeped in historical scientific and medical thought exploring the fascinating boundary between life and death, reminding us of the reality of living and dying in the early nineteenth century.



Michael Wainwright. "On What Matters for African Americans: W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* in the Light of Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*." *Science and Literature: Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Kostas Tampakis, George N. Vlahakis, and Evangelia Chordaki. Athens: Institute of Historical Research, 2021. 149–56. <https://www.anavathmis.eu/e-books/#1627533241440-12d7ec5e-a0aa>

In *Reasons and Persons* (1984), Derek Parfit supports his Reductionist contention "that personal identity is not what matters" by turning to the neurosurgical findings of Roger Wolcott Sperry. As Hixson Professor of Psychobiology at CalTech, Sperry pioneered an operation for acute epilepsy that severed the nerve fibres between a patient's upper brain hemispheres. The procedure ameliorated the sufferer's symptoms, but unintentionally left the patient with two independent streams of consciousness. This unexpected consequence provides Parfit with "striking evidence in favour of the Reductionist View" that personal identity is not what matters; "what matters is Relation R: psychological connectedness and/or continuity."

Parfit tests the elements of Relation R against the logical criteria of necessity and sufficiency with a series of thought experiments that includes minds with "no single state of awareness." He concludes that two separate spheres of consciousness within a single mind not only fit Relation R, but also emphasize the potential differences between the constituent elements of that relation. Psychological rather than physiological trauma can split consciousness, with psychological connectedness characterizing each resultant stream, but one stream exhibiting little or no psychological continuity with the pre-traumatic mind.

Parfit's deductions have important implications for African-American studies. For, "the problem of the Twentieth Century," as W. E. B. Du Bois insists in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "is the problem of the color-line." Enforcement of this demarcation produces the "peculiar sensation" of African-American "double-consciousness." Unfortunately, literary critics have consistently identified Du Bois's proposition with social rather than cognitive issues; Parfit's scientifically informed contention provides a means of readdressing this misunderstanding, as a detailed analysis of "Of the Coming of John", chapter 13 in *The Souls of Black Folk*, illustrates.

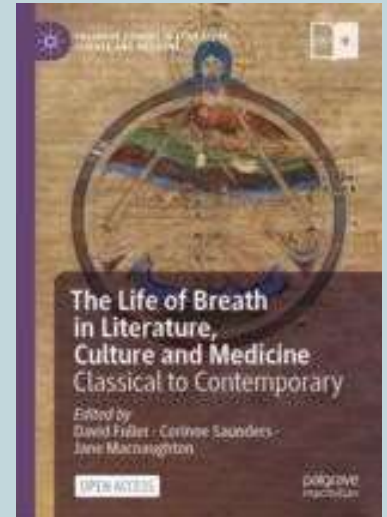
Applications for BSLS Small Grants to facilitate and promote the study of literature and science and for BSLS bursaries to support postgraduate student members and early career researchers are now accepted quarterly, by the first of March, June, September, and December. See the [funding](#) section of the BSLS website for further details.

Three new books from the Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine series

The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary
Edited by David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane Macnaughton

This open access book studies breath and breathing in literature and culture and provides crucial insights into the history of medicine, health, and the emotions; the foundations of beliefs concerning body, spirit and world; the connections between breath and creativity; and the phenomenology of breath and breathlessness.

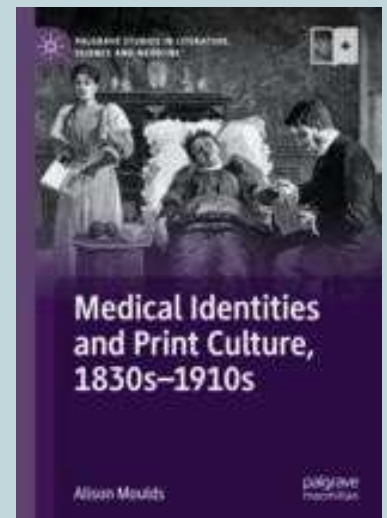
Contributions span the classical, medieval, early modern, Romantic, Victorian, modern and contemporary periods, drawing on medical writings, philosophy, theology and the visual arts as well as on literary, historical and cultural studies. The collection illustrates the complex significance and symbolic power of breath and breathlessness across time: breath is written deeply into ideas of nature, spirituality, emotion, creativity, and being, and is inextricable from notions of consciousness, spirit, inspiration, voice, feeling, freedom, and movement. The volume also demonstrates the long-standing connections between breath and place, politics and aesthetics, illuminating both contrasts and continuities.



Medical Identities and Print Culture, 1830s–1910s

Author: Alison Moulds

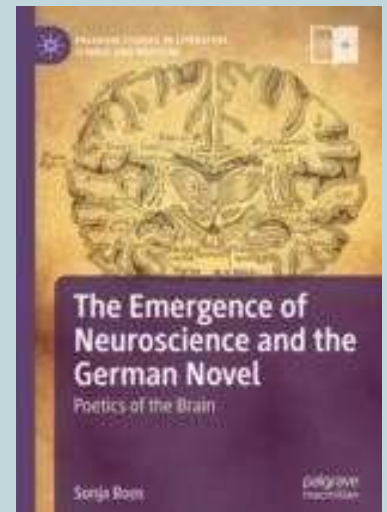
This book examines how the medical profession engaged with print and literary culture to shape its identities between the 1830s and 1910s in Britain and its empire. Moving away from a focus on medical education and professional appointments, the book reorients attention to how medical self-fashioning interacted with other axes of identity, including age, gender, race, and the spaces of practice. Drawing on medical journals and fiction, as well as professional advice guides and popular periodicals, this volume considers how images of medical practice and professionalism were formed in the cultural and medical imagination. Alison Moulds uncovers how medical professionals were involved in textual production and consumption as editors, contributors, correspondents, readers, authors, and reviewers. Ultimately, this book opens up new perspectives on the relationship between literature and medicine, revealing how the profession engaged with a range of textual practices to build communities, air grievances, and augment its cultural authority and status in public life.



The Emergence of Neuroscience and the German Novel: Poetics of the Brain

Author: Sonja Boos

The Emergence of Neuroscience and the German Novel: Poetics of the Brain revises the dominant narrative about the distinctive psychological inwardness and introspective depth of the German novel by reinterpreting the novel's development from the perspective of the nascent discipline of neuroscience, the emergence of which is coterminous with the rise of the novel form. In particular, it asks how the novel's formal properties—stylistic, narrative, rhetorical, and figurative—correlate with the formation of a neuroscientific discourse, and how the former may have assisted, disrupted, and/or intensified the medical articulation of neurological concepts. This study poses the question: how does this rapidly evolving field emerge in the context of nineteenth century cultural practices and what were the conditions for its emergence in the German-speaking world specifically? Where did neuroscience begin and how did it broaden in scope? And most crucially, to what degree does it owe its existence to literature?



CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR *THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO PERFORMANCE AND SCIENCE*

CFP Routledge Companion to Performance and Science
Editors: Paul Johnson, Simon Parry and Adele Senior

We invite proposals for *The Routledge Companion to Performance and Science*.

This extensive volume aims to capture the growing international interest in the intersections between performance and science, both as a body of knowledge and a set of practices. The collection will chart a wide range of theoretical approaches, as well as both new and well-established attitudes towards science, scientific methods, and scientific knowledge. We welcome a range of perspectives and practices.

The collection asks:

- How can scientific knowledges be interrogated by performance practices?
- What are the ways in which performance can explore the human implications of scientific developments?
- How can scientific practices be understood through performance theories?
- How does performance negotiate representations of scientists or scientific practices and ideas?

The questions raised by the *Companion to Performance and Science* become more urgent as we move through the 21st century, resonating with the immediate challenges of climate change, energy and water security, data science, genetic engineering, pandemics, and so on. Such challenges are culturally, historically, and politically situated, and we invite contributions from across the world that reflect local, national, international, and/or global perspectives. We are seeking contributions to the following sections:

1. Histories of science and performance

This opening section will offer a series of historical and international perspectives on various links between science and performance, illustrating some of the ways that scientific developments have shaped performance and vice versa.

2. Disciplined Performance

This section will focus on a range of scientific disciplinary fields addressing their manifestations through theatre and/or performance and their influence on theatre and performance studies.

3. Performance Cultures and Science

This section will chart the wide range of performance forms that have been inspired by science and explore how such forms constitute distinct aesthetics of science.

4. The Sciences of Performance

This section will outline the ways in which scientific approaches have been applied to performance, focusing on the (cultural, aesthetic, social, political, ethical, technical/technological) implications of thinking scientifically about training, making, and experiencing performance.

5. Science, Performance and Communication

This section will explore the way that theatre and performance might offer alternative or productive ways of understanding and/or communicating science. Authors in this section may come from a wide range of disciplines including scientific and social science domains.

We are particularly keen to receive submissions for all sections from research students, early career researchers, and black and global majority heritage scholars. We also welcome contributions from practitioners from the wider arts scene, science, science communication, or other fields.

Please submit an abstract of up to 500 words and a brief bio of 200 words, indicating which section your proposed contribution aligns with and the intended length of your piece (see below), by **Monday 29 November 2021** to

Routledgeperformancescience@gmail.com

First draft submissions: **1 June 2022**

We would expect draft submissions to be either in the form of research chapters (max. 7000 words) or practitioner texts (max. 2000 words). Please contact us if you would like to propose a contribution in a different format.

Publication date: **December 2023**

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE CONFERENCE 2022

**FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, MANCHESTER, UK
7 – 9 APRIL 2022**

The seventeenth annual conference will take place at Friends' Meeting House, Manchester, UK, from Thursday 7 April until Saturday 9 April 2022. This event is organised as a partnership between the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University.

Plenaries: [Susan M. Gaines](#) (University of Bremen); [Shital Pravinchandra](#) (Queen Mary, University of London); [Leah Knight](#) (Brock University)

The conference programme will be confirmed in December to allow you to plan your travel early. Registration will take place up to February.



Friends' Meeting House
<https://meetinghousemanchester.co.uk/>

About the conference

All talks and plenaries are to take place in person in the Friends' Meeting House, with extra activities at Manchester Central Library and the International Anthony Burgess Centre. We will observe any social distancing advice in place at the time of the conference.

There will be two free reception events and a conference banquet (for an extra fee). Cost will be around £120 for unwaged, around £200 for waged. Vegetarian and vegan food will be standard and other dietary requirements can be accommodated.

BSLs membership

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

About accommodation

Manchester has a number of hotels, B&Bs and Airbnb accommodation suited to every budget. We will be circulating a list of hotels close to the central location.

About access

Each venue has good access, and we will circulate details closer to the conference date.

Local organising committee

Jerome de Groot, Amy Chambers, James Sumner, Noelle Gallagher

<https://www.bsls.ac.uk/>

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