



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

*Dr Jenni Halpin (Savannah State University), Chair; Dr Laura E. Ludtke (Independent Scholar), Secretary;  
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Overseas Representative, Europe: Dr Liliane Campos (Sorbonne Nouvelle University).*

## ON DECOLONIALITY IN LITERATURE AND SCIENCE BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM 2021

As is our regular practice, our 2021 Winter Symposium was a PGR- and ECR-focused event with interest for scholars at all levels. This year's was organized by executive committee members Dr Rachel Murray and Dr Chisomo Kalinga and took place on Zoom on 20 November.

Nearly fifty people were online for Dr Josie Gill's keynote lecture 'Decoloniality, Literature and Science in the Age of Coronavirus'. She reviewed the norms of our interdisciplinary field and called for us to take seriously the need to decolonize, asking 'How can literature and science studies address racial injustices and inequalities, and what would it mean for it to do so?' and 'How are the events of 2020 (and the conditions which created them) linked to the relationship between the sciences and humanities?' Beyond emphasising the need for action in this direction, she began it by presenting a decolonialising reading of the tearing down of the Colston statue in Bristol; radically and essentially beginning from the observation of the harms inflicted by the statue's implicit celebration of injustice and enslavement, her reading powerfully articulated the statue's removal as a public health intervention.

During the middle of the symposium Ben Doyle of Bloomsbury Academic and then Tom Bray of the Wellcome trust shared advice on publishing and grant-seeking.

Attendance continued strong, despite some technical difficulties in the roundtable, with Dr Victoria Osei-Bonsu, Dr Manali Karmakar, and Dr Sandeep Bakshi. All three scholars shared their current research directions. Histories of exclusion were common threads among their various foci within the medical humanities, most centrally exclusions of non-Eurocentric knowledge-formation. Whether this is a dearth of extant research on the connections between religion and reproduction as Karmakar found, distortions produced by literary periodization based in European history as Bakshi emphasized, or the need to draw connections between texts and students' actual experiences as Osei-Bonsu

advocates, all three scholars led the Symposium's attendees deeper into recognition not only of the problems to be addressed by decolonization but also of strategies they are building to enact decolonial scholarship.

Thanks are due to everybody who contributed time, attention, or expertise, especially Josie Gill, Ben Doyle, Tom Bray, Victoria Osei-Bonsu, Manali Karmakar, Sandeep Bakshi, Laura Ludtke, Liliane Campos, Ros Powell, Will Tattersdill, and our organisers Rachel Murray and Chisomo Kalinga.

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

Winter 2022 Newsletter

# MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## THEATRE ABOUT SCIENCE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

25-27 NOVEMBER 2021, COIMBRA, PORTUGAL

Theatre about Science was a three-day conference on the intersections of theatre and science, looking to their past, present, and future. As well as keynotes, panels, and workshops, there were film screenings and theatrical performances.

I gave the opening keynote address: “Theatre and Climate Change: Taking the ‘Anthro’ out of the ‘Scene’”. Theatre has been inventively engaging with climate change for decades. Yet many of these works remain narrowly anthropocentric, even though there are so many other ways performance can be harnessed to convey the problems and challenges of climate change. In this talk, I explore some of the innovative stage images and scales that theatre-makers have produced in their creative endeavours to capture and convey the current ecological crisis, and offer some models and theoretical approaches that might be productive in thinking about the theatre’s representations of climate change, and of the science of climate change. I argue that theatre’s unique functioning in a range of spatial and temporal dimensions and sensory modes offers rich potential for representations of climate change that might move us into a more-than-human scope of thought.

—Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr

## THE FUTURE OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION: WHERE WILL TOMORROW’S BABIES COME FROM?

An interdisciplinary Lancaster University research team, led by Professor of Bioethics Stephen Wilkinson, and including Professor Sharon Ruston, has been awarded a £1 million Research Development Award from Wellcome to explore the cultural, ethical, legal and social challenges arising from advances in human reproductive technologies. The team will explore the conceptual and ethical implications of a range of scenarios likely to be technologically possible within a generation including the development of fetuses wholly outside the human body, new methods of creating eggs and sperm that will allow the creation of children with two genetic parents of the same sex or multiple genetic parents, and genome editing, which will enable a much greater degree of control than ever before over the genetic makeup of future people.

Through a series of workshops, networking events, and funding schemes, this award will enable the team to explore questions such as the extent to which new reproductive technologies may disrupt, or even render obsolete, existing concepts and language (ideas such as ‘birth’, ‘pregnancy’, ‘mother’, and ‘child’); how linguistic and conceptual change may be exploited or resisted in public debates about human reproduction; what legal and regulatory reforms will be needed to accommodate new ways of making babies; what affects changes in modes of reproduction may have upon prevailing social norms governing personal and sexual relationships; and other questions like these, in order to shape the future direction of humanities, social sciences, and bioethics research in emerging reproductive technologies.

Wellcome received more than 100 applications to the Research Development Awards scheme and Prof. Wilkinson’s is one of just eight awards made.

The future of human reproduction programme will start in spring 2022 and will run until summer 2025.

—Sharon Ruston

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.

# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

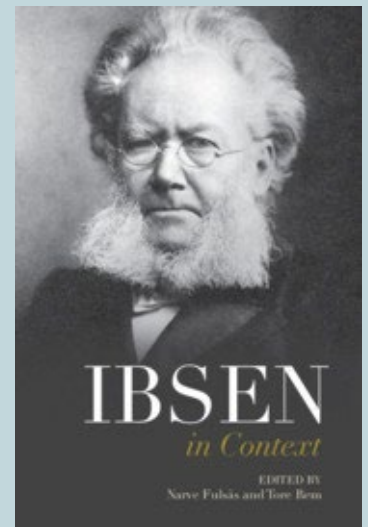
Zoë Lehmann Imfeld. 'Have We Forgotten How to Have Fun in "Literature and Science"?', *Anglistik* 32.3 (2021): 121-134. <https://angl.winter-verlag.de/article/ANGL/2021/3/11>

What is it, really, that the field of 'literature and science' is trying to achieve? This article re-examines what the practice of reading literature as an interdisciplinary endeavour looks like (and what it might look like). In doing so, I argue for the reinstatement of an attitude to literature and science that privileges the methodologies of literary studies as a discrete academic field. The aim of this argument is to undermine the rich fruits that interdisciplinarity brings to literary studies but rather to argue that it is the identity of literary studies that makes it such a valuable contributor to interdisciplinarity in the academy. My aim is to begin to combat a prevailing discourse in which literary studies is situated as 'in service' to the work of other disciplines. In the first part of this article, I discuss what I see as potential problems with the status of literary studies as part of interdisciplinary work, namely in the field of literature and science. I also identify the symptoms of these problems as being particularly prevalent in regard to my own area of research, science fiction. In an effort to demonstrate a profitable role for a return to reading literary texts as text, I then turn to a few fictional pieces which, I believe, demonstrate both an insistence to be treated as fiction as well as the potential to make powerful contributions to the discourse of literature and science.

Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr. "Science." *Ibsen in Context*, ed. Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem. Cambridge UP, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108381130>

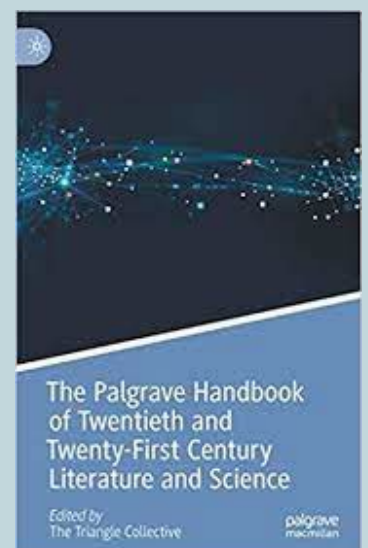
Ibsen engaged with many of the dominant scientific ideas of his time, especially those in the natural sciences such as evolution and heredity. This chapter explores such scientific contexts and shows how and why Ibsen oscillated between respecting science, medicine, and technology's role in humanity's progress and disparaging their destructive capabilities. The discussion also points out how science underpins some of Ibsen's revolutionary innovations in theatrical form and content: his explorations of Zola's naturalism, his dramatization of Darwin's ideas, his foregrounding of the family unit as the subject of drama, his depiction of the constant tension between the twin forces of heredity and environment, and his radical scenographic vision of nature and landscape.

Keywords: science, evolution, heredity, naturalism, Darwin, Zola, *The Wild Duck*, *The Lady from the Sea*, scenography, environment, Von Humboldt, progress



Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr. "'Golden Dust' in the Wind: Genetics, Contagion, and Early Twentieth-Century American Theatre." *The Palgrave Handbook of Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature and Science*, ed. N. Ahuja, et al. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

This chapter compares two plays of the early twentieth century in America that engage very differently with scientific and medical subject matter: Susan Glaspell's pioneering treatment of heredity, genetics, and evolution in *Inheritors* (1921) and Sidney Howard's dramatization of the quest to identify the cause of and eradicate yellow fever in *Yellow-Jack* (1934), which Howard based on Paul de Kruif's bestselling book *Microbe Hunters*. These two plays represent radically different approaches to putting science on stage and show the deep history and tenacity of certain ways of dramatizing science that still persist. The two plays also raise intriguing questions about how gender figures in conceptualizing science on stage.





# PhD Viva Success

Janette Leaf

## Locating the Sympathetic Insect: Cultural Entomology, Egyptianised Gothic and Emotional Affect in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*

Inspired by the metamorphic life cycle of insects, and prompted by the rapid decline in insect numbers, Janette's interdisciplinary thesis fuses entomology with a close analysis of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic literature which embraces postcolonialism, cultural historicism, Animal Studies, spatiality, adaptation theory and ecocriticism. It examines how Marsh's exploitation of the rhetoric of repugnance, and his monstrous manipulation of the human:insect size ratio, exists in tension with late-nineteenth century scientific and aesthetic appreciation of insects. The thesis links speciesism with racism, subalternity and misogyny, and contrasts these negatives with the biological dung beetle and the sacred scarab of Ancient Egypt. It charts a trajectory from natural history via mythology and horror to environmental concerns, locating shifting perceptions of kinship and fellow feeling, and arguing that a sympathetic response to an insect (or any persons they are called upon to represent) is a prerequisite for the generation of behaviours beneficial to all.

Janette's external examiner was Prof. Martin Willis, ex-Chair of the BSLS. Her internal examiner was Dr Minna Vuohelainen, Marsh specialist and Victorianist. The socially distanced viva took place in person with vaccinations and ventilation facilitating a safe, enjoyable and engaging occasion. Janette passed with minor corrections.

Birkbeck, University of London



# BSLS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE POSITIONS

The current terms of the communications officer, early career officer, and overseas representative for Europe are ending in April. In addition, there is a vacancy at overseas representative for North America, and the treasurer is seeking to step down at that time.

The present early career officer and overseas representative for Europe are willing to continue in their roles, and all of these roles are open to nominations. The chair will happily have exploratory discussions with interested members.

Any member of the BSLS is eligible for these posts, except that it is expected that the overseas representatives will generally be based in the regions they represent, and any member can propose themselves or someone else. Each proposed candidate will also need two nominations from members of the BSLS, and these proposals and nominations should be sent to the chair, Jenni Halpin ([jennihalpin@gmail.com](mailto:jennihalpin@gmail.com)), and to the secretary, Laura Ludtke ([lludtke@gmail.com](mailto:lludtke@gmail.com)). Expressions of interest and proposals should be received by Thursday 31 March at the very latest.

#### 4. OFFICERS

4.5 The membership of the Executive Committee shall be determined by elections held at the annual general meeting of the society. Members wishing to stand for election should be nominated by two members of the society before the start of the AGM. Where there is more than one candidate for any post, election shall be held by a ballot on the basis of a single transferable vote.

4.6 Members of the Executive Committee shall serve three-year terms of office.

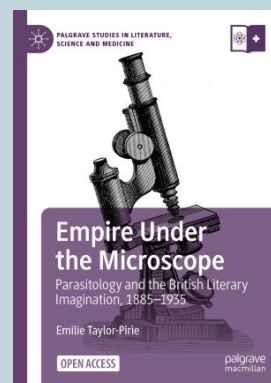
*bsls.ac.uk*



## New Book from the Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine series

Emilie Taylor-Pirie. *Empire Under the Microscope: Parasitology and the British Literary Imagination, 1885-1935*. Palgrave, 2022. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-84717-3>

This open access book, informed by archival research, pays particular attention to the social, linguistic, and material networks between literature and science and establishes how scientific and literary narratives combined to shape popular understanding.



# CALLS

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR MATERIAL AGENCY: EARLY MODERN PERSPECTIVES

SEMINAR AT THE 16<sup>TH</sup> ESSE CONFERENCE 2022, MAINZ, 29 AUG – 2 SEP 2022

Convenors:

Dr. Irmtraud Huber, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, [irmtraud.huber@anglistik.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:irmtraud.huber@anglistik.uni-muenchen.de)

Dr. Ursula Kluwick, Universität Bern, [ursula.kluwick@ens.unibe.ch](mailto:ursula.kluwick@ens.unibe.ch)

“Nature is but one united material Body” writes Margaret Cavendish in her *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, first published in 1668, in which she makes strong materialist claims that insist on the interconnectedness of all of nature’s constituents.<sup>1</sup> Eccentric at her time, such thought resonates across the intervening centuries with more recent new materialist endeavours to promote a flat ontology that rethinks both Cartesian dualities and Newtonian mechanics. Recent interventions in literary and cultural theory like new materialism, ecocriticism and actor-network-theory have made a concerted effort to rethink the role of the material world, emphasising in particular its agency. As the example of Cavendish demonstrates, there are historical precedents for ontologies which do not understand matter as passive. This seminar wishes to explore Early Modern ideas about material agency and the interaction of human and nonhuman matter, aiming to bring such historical perspectives into a critical dialogue with contemporary theory. Reviewing concepts and cultural as well as literary representations of Early Modern material agency will serve to highlight continuities as well as differences and allow us to explore history as a playground and experimental laboratory for ideas which we can see taking centre stage today.

This seminar will welcome abstracts on any topic exploring Early Modern material agency and its representation in literature and culture, including, but not restricted to:

- Early Modern versions of material agency and flat ontologies, like monism and atomism
- the agency of matter, objects, and things (for instance, cultic or religious objects, fetishes, etc.)
- medical theory, especially ideas about the interaction of body, mind, and substances like food, medicine or poison; plants; humour theory
- agency of abject matter, like waste, excrement, corpses

Please send your proposals of no more than 500 words for 20 min papers to both convenors by email ([irmtraud.huber@anglistik.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:irmtraud.huber@anglistik.uni-muenchen.de); [ursula.kluwick@ens.unibe.ch](mailto:ursula.kluwick@ens.unibe.ch)) by 11 February 2022.

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

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Ground of Natural Philosophy Divided into Thirteen Parts: with an Appendix Containing Five Parts written by the Duchess of Newcastle*. London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1668, p. 3. Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2011, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A53045.0001.001/1:3.1?rgn=div2:view=fulltext> (accessed 24.07.2021).

# CALL FOR PAPERS FOR *PERFORMING AND COMMUNICATING SCIENCE*

Co-editors: Sara V. Amaral, M. Teresa Girão da Cruz, Mário Montenegro, Francisca Moreira, Fernando M. Oliveira

Following the extraordinary meeting held in Coimbra last November, we are organizing a thematic volume with a selection of papers by participants in the conference.

The volume's guidelines are coincident with those of the Theatre about Science: theory and practice conference, aiming at giving an account of contemporary performing arts and science intersections, tracing the evolution of previous trends and practices, identifying new trends and types of intersection, expanding knowledge in this field of study and practice by broadening the geographic coverage of contributors and experiences.

In addition, as the conference so well demonstrated, the initiative of crossing disciplinary boundaries comes from both sides of the equation, the artistic and the scientific, creating a rich and fertile ecosystem that we expect to be reflected in this volume.

These intersections give rise to questions that might be explored in the proposed contributions, such as:

- Can theatre help solve scientific problems?
- Does scientific knowledge transform theatre?
- What kinds of audiences for science in performance? Does theatre make sense in science communication? What kind of knowledge can theatre add about science?
- Can theatre transform the ways scientists perform their research?
- How does theatre engage with public debates about science and scientific developments? Can theatre inspire new scientific research?
- Where is the boundary (if any) between science communication and performing communication? WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY... do theatre and science meet?

**Deadlines:** 14 February 2022: confirmation of the previous abstract or resubmission of a modified version; 2 May 2022: first draft; Mid-2022: the volume will be submitted to an international publisher

## Submission formats:

Papers (6000 to 8000 words, original research articles or empirical articles that report on your original studies)

Reports on Practices (2000 to 2500 words, short papers on practice cases that can contribute significantly to the existing knowledge on the field)

Please use the following structure:

- The title
- An abstract
- The main text, including an introduction (background, research questions and hypothesis), methods, results and discussion
- Figures and figure legends (up to 4 images)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- References
- Supplementary Information (if any)

Please use the following structure:

- The title
- An abstract
- The main body (not subdivided)
- Figures and figure legends (up to 2 images)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- References

For all Manuscripts:

- All submissions must be in English
- Your manuscript text file should start with a title page that shows author affiliations and contact information identifying the corresponding author with an asterisk
- You should provide all textual content in a single file, prepared using Microsoft Word
- You should supply any figures as individual files
- You should use the APA Format Citation for in-text and reference list citations (please see here for a complete Guide <https://www.mendeley.com/guides/apa-citation-guide/>)
- You should combine and supply any Supplementary Information as a separate file, preferably in PDF format
- You should include the title of the manuscript and author list in the first page of the Supplementary Information file

Free and unlimited access to the full-text of all articles will be guaranteed.

The submitted articles should be unpublished and not being considered for publication elsewhere. Contributors are responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce any materials, including photographs and illustrations, for which they do not hold copyright.

Contact: [theatreaboutscience@gmail.com](mailto:theatreaboutscience@gmail.com)

# BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE CONFERENCE 2022

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

This event is organised as a partnership between the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University.

The deadline for registration is 11 February.

## 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.

## BSLS membership

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

## Local organising committee

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

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

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[#BSLS2022](#)

[BSLS2022Manchester@gmail.com](mailto:BSLS2022Manchester@gmail.com)



*Friends' Meeting House*

<https://meetinghousemanchester.co.uk/>

## FUTURE BSLS CONFERENCE

BSLS 18, EDINBURGH NAPIER, 6-8 APRIL 2023

The Society eagerly invites conversations with members interested in hosting upcoming annual conferences. Please contact the chair, Jenni Halpin ([jennihalpin@gmail.com](mailto:jennihalpin@gmail.com)).

*bsls.ac.uk*