



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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## BSLS GRANTS REPORTS

### BEASTLY MODERNISMS 2019

#### A BEASTLY WELCOME

'I want to think about what it means to give a beastly welcome,' Peter Adkins begins, introducing our first keynote, Derek Ryan (University of Kent). Giving a beastly welcome, it turns out, is an ethical approach to scholarship that holds openness, scepticism, humour and questioning. It involves prising open the jaws of one discipline to let the planktonic matters of others drift through, nourishing and encouraging richer conversations. It is something, maybe, that 'just happens' when you bring a certain number of enthusiastic, cutting-edge scholars together for two days, forming something like a zoology of fugitive, moving thought.

Beastly Modernisms 2019, a conference held at the University of Glasgow on 12-13 September, aimed for this symbiotic approach to literary studies. Organised by PhD candidates whose work traverses the realms of

animal studies, modernism, and the environmental humanities—Peter Adkins (University of Kent), Saskia McCracken (University of Glasgow), Maria Sledmere (University of Glasgow) and Caitlin Stobie (University of Leeds)—the event quickly grew from a planned symposium to an international conference, with guest speakers flying in from Paris, America, Poland, Russia, and beyond. Such is the appetite for a more beastly scholarship, whose commodious bounds proliferate in animate metaphors, puns and sightlines of future critical thought.

#### ANIMALS AND MODERNISM IN GLASGOW

Recent work on animals, animacies and modernism includes books by Carrie Rohman, Caroline Hovanec, Dererk Ryan, Roni Grén, Kari Weil, and Mel Y. Chen. No conference to date has centred on animal studies and modernism, and Glasgow felt like an ideal location for bringing a twist of the avant-garde, of creative-critical openness, to the traditional conference setting. Not only are the Scottish Network of Modernist Studies (SNoMS) and the British Animal Studies Network (BASN) based in Glasgow, but the city is also home to a vibrant, ecology-focused arts scene—from the [Sculpture & Environmental Art BA](#) at the Glasgow School of Art to [A+E Collective](#) and the [Glasgow Animal Studies Reading Group](#).

#### A MENAGERIE OF PERSPECTIVES

The conference came together from a shared feeling that 'the animal question' was at a critical point within modernist scholarship, and that it deserved a platform of its own. With funding secured from The British Society for Literature and Science, The Vegan

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

Autumn 2019 Newsletter

Society, British Comparative Literature Association, and the University of Glasgow's College of Arts, we were able to explore what this question of modernism's 'beasts' might entail.

We were delighted that delegates and speakers responded so readily to the spirit of the theme. There were panels on Bugs and Beasts, Modernist Empathies, Waste and Trash Animals, Surreal Creatures, Joycean Beasts, Animal Ethics, and Marine Life—to name a few. Papers were given on myriad themes of a spirited, beastly nature: the multiple 'lives' of nature documentary (Amy Cutler), modernism's telluric depths (Cathryn Setz), cosmic cats (Molly Gilroy), animal artists (Kirsten Strom), the queer and comic nonhuman (Maureen O'Connor), and modernist jellyfish (Rachel Murray). Throughout the conference, our speakers challenged us to think of modernism not just in archival or literary-historical terms but also as a mobilising set of cultural and critical tendencies, with unique questions to ask continuously of language, ontology and coexistence.

It was especially heartening to see a mix of creative, critical and multidisciplinary approaches to academic conference papers. We had practising artists, photographers, and filmmakers in attendance, sharing their work but also engaging in vital ethical and aesthetic discussion around the context of that work's production and reception, in tandem with animals, humans, and the more-than-human. Martin Pover, for instance, gave a talk on photographing zoos as 'theatres of the wild,' and Rosie Roberts, a recent graduate of the inaugural Masters in Art Writing programme at the Glasgow School of Art, screened her film *Pan* and took part in a lively Q&A which saw rich reflections on reparative filmmaking, precarity, the 'choral I', the importance of play and the significance of 'the everyday' in questions of ecology and what we might call (in resistance to the human-animal distinction) beastly intimacies.

## BEASTLY POETRY

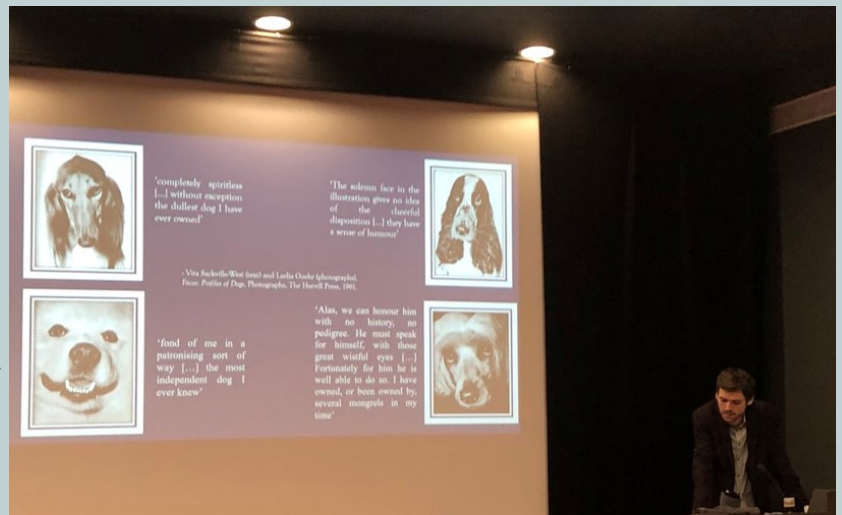
A crucial part of the conference was the Beastly Poetry night, hosted (quite appropriately) at the Butterfly and Pig bar in Glasgow. The audience formed a mix of conference delegates, friends, family and familiar faces from the city's wide-ranging literary scene. Our readers, some invited and others who applied as part of our 'open mic' part of the evening, were: Jelle Cauwenberghs, Alexandra Grunberg, Eva Isherwood-Wallace, Miranda Cichy, Jane Hartshorn, Daisy Lafarge, Callie Gardner, Jane Goldman, and Colin Herd. The packed-out room was testament to the Glasgow poetry scene but also an indication that modernism and its beastly entrails is alive and well 'in the present': a question of constant reinvention, playful citation, diverse registers, and formal experiment. From Cichy's poetry of avian extinction to Hartshorn's mythic, visceral femininity; Goldman's biting, canine aesthetics; Lafarge's wasps, stinging 'with pagan abandon'; and Herd's anthropomorphised and tenderly-loved 'Laplaplaplaplaplaplap Top', the poets challenged what might be a beast and what might be modern, and how we can begin to address that in the question of lyric relationality and speech itself.



Poet: Colin Herd

## BEASTS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

We were extremely lucky to have two keynotes whose work has been essential to the emergence and development of our field, hive, habitat, tropics, or indeed ocean of study (there was a distinctly transatlantic, borderless and porous flavour to many of the talks). Derek Ryan concluded day one with 'Beastly Bloomsbury' which argued that the animal turn in modernist studies 'demands new readings of the most familiar modernist texts'; becoming close readers of the metaphors that structure animality, hierarchy and difference; noticing aspects of 'the animal' which elude human understanding. Kicking off day two, keynote Kari Weil (Wesleyan University) gave a vivid talk on animal magnetism: 'the force that one animal body can have on another'. By moving through recent art (Berlinde de Bruyckere), French feminist philosophy, and ideas from poststructuralism, Weil's talk questioned the boundaries, entanglements and representations at stake in animal relationality. She considered the force of spectatorship, of contact and touch, of memory, narrative and trauma, as well as the alien qualities within language itself that rub against our animal being.



Keynote: Derek Ryan. Image credit: Katherine Ebury



Keynote: Kari Weil

## A BEASTLY ETHOS

One recurring theme throughout the conference was that of 'mastery'. Following Sarah Wood in her book *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces* (2014), we ask what would a textuality or poetics without mastery look like? The papers of Beastly Modernism 2019 go some way to answering this question, or at the very least opening it up. Perhaps to be a beastly modernist requires something of a surrender of sovereignty, a recognition of the animal within ourselves (sated, happily, by the university's delicious vegan catering and the hospitality of the Centre for Contemporary Arts, where our dinner was held on Friday) and an embrace of mobility, curiosity, fluctuation within thought, a shifting, plural, contaminated 'I' that bears its beastly echoes. To listen, share, and challenge our familiar critical habitus.

Some delegates had the pleasure of a tour around the Hunterian's Special Collections, facilitated by zoology curator Maggie Reilly. And so the conference began with this notion of the gaze and the touch: of what it means to look at what is held and preserved, to think through archiving and curation within the critical force of our own work. It was clear to us that many exciting conversations were happening throughout the breaks and Q&A sessions, and delegates commented positively on the approachability of our speakers. We hope, then, that this might be something of what a 'beastly welcome' entails, and who knows what tracks, turns and paths of flight might happen next...

*Maria Sledmere*

## NARRATIVE SCIENCE IN TECHNO-ENVIRONMENTS—MEETING REPORT

In July 2019 the BSLS and BSHS partnered with a British Academy funded workshop 'Narrative Science in Techno-Environments'. Organised by Dr. Dominic Berry, this workshop, and the network it creates, builds on the European Research Council funded project 'Narrative Science', led by Prof. Mary Morgan at the LSE. More about their work on narrative in science, technology, engineering, and medicine can be found on the Narrative Science website: [www.narrative-science.org](http://www.narrative-science.org).

A core aim of the workshop was to build opportunities for interdisciplinary thinking between literary scholars and historians of science and technology who are addressing themes within environmental history. Taking narrative as a shared focal point, and endeavouring to find the ways in which sciences and technologies of the environment rely on narrative (in making knowledge of it, planning, assessment, evaluation etc. etc.), researchers addressed cases that spanned organic and ecological scales, from the individual organism to outer space. Many of these presentations were video recorded, and can be viewed online through the Resources page of the Narrative Science site.

Over the course of two days, 25 speakers—primarily early career researchers—shared their ongoing research on topics including histories of fire, animal sexuality, flooding, agriculture, mountain exploration, and conservation. Pictured here are Prof. Harriet Ritvo, Dr. Gregory Lynall, and Saliha Bayir, addressing in turn what is at stake in discussion of species, renewable energy in the scientific and literary past and present, and new ways of understanding microbial ecology. All three presentations can now be viewed online.

Anyone who would be interested in remaining informed about future work at the intersection of narrative, environment, history, science, and technology should write to Dr. Dominic Berry: [d.j.berry@lse.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.berry@lse.ac.uk). He would like to record his gratitude to the BSLS and BSHS for agreeing to partner with this meeting, the British Academy for funding it through a Rising Star Engagement Award, and the ERC for additional contributions.



*Dominic Berry*

**NARRATIVE  
SCIENCE**



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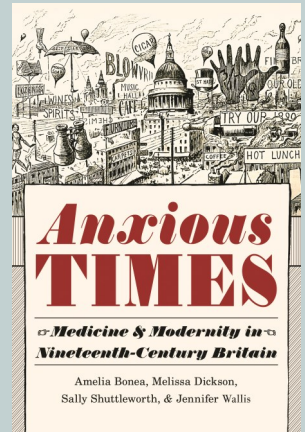
**The  
British  
Academy**



# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

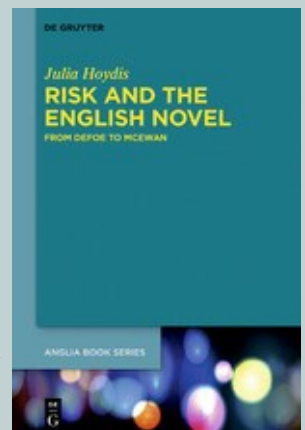
Bonea, Amelia, Melissa Dickson, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jennifer Wallis. *Anxious Times: Medicine and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Pittsburgh Press, May 2019).

Much like the Information Age of the twenty-first century, the Industrial Age was a period of great social changes brought about by rapid industrialization and urbanization, speed of travel, and global communications. The literature, medicine, science, and popular journalism of the nineteenth century attempted to diagnose problems of the mind and body that such drastic transformations were thought to generate: a range of conditions or ‘diseases of modernity’ resulting from specific changes in the social and physical environment (new technologies, changing work and leisure practices, and evolving cultural pressures). The alarmist rhetoric of newspapers and popular periodicals, advertising various ‘neurotic remedies’, in turn inspired a new class of physicians and quack medical practices devoted to the treatment and perpetuation of such conditions. *Anxious Times* examines perceptions of the pressures of modern life and their impact on bodily and mental health in nineteenth-century Britain.



Hoydis, Julia. *Risk and the English Novel: From Defoe to McEwan*. Anglia Book Series 66 (De Gruyter, September 2019). ISBN: 978-3-11-061541-8 <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/539114>

Taking the cue from the currency of risk in popular and interdisciplinary academic discourse, this book explores the development of the English novel in relation to the emergence and institutionalization of risk, from its origins in probability theory in the late seventeenth century to the global ‘risk society’ in the twenty-first century. Focussing on 29 novels from Defoe to McEwan, this book argues for the contemporaneity of the rise of risk and the novel and suggests that there is much to gain from reading the risk society from a diachronic, literary-cultural perspective. Advancing the study of risk in fiction beyond the confinement to dystopian disaster narratives, this book shows how topical notions, such as chance and probability, uncertainty and responsibility, fears of decline and transgression, all cluster around risk.



## OUP DISCOUNT

A 30% OUP discount can now be accessed via the members' section of the website.  
Restrictions/terms & conditions apply.

# MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

## INSECTS THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

With Alice’s Day gone, ‘Insects Through the Looking Glass’ has now finished at the Story Museum—and we’ve had a fantastic time! We’ve met so many excited visitors, it’s been a really exhilarating experience. We owe our thanks, first of all, to our hosts at [The Story Museum](#) and our funders at the [Royal Entomological Society](#) and the [British Society for the History of Science](#), but especially also all those who helped us make the event such a success—the [Oxford University Museum of Natural History](#), *Beetle Boy* author [M.G. Leonard](#), illustrator [Carim Nahaboo](#), and Tolkien expert [Dr Dimitra Fimi](#)!

*Franziska Kohlt*

# CALLS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

## EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM 2019 EXTINCTIONS AND REBELLIONS

SATURDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2019, UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL  
ORGANISERS: ANNA BURTON AND SALLY BLACKBURN-DANIELS

**EVENTBRITE LINK:** <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/extinctions-and-rebellions-bsls-winter-symposium-2019-tickets-76867967159>

“We are at a time in history where everyone with any insight of the climate crisis that threatens our civilisation – and the entire biosphere – must speak out in clear language, no matter how uncomfortable and unprofitable that may be.”

In 2019, extinction is no longer the province of dinosaurs, the Dodo, or species far away in space and time. As Greta Thunberg argued in her Davos speech earlier this year, and as the ongoing socio-political efforts of the Extinction Rebellion suggest, extinction of the human (as well as the non-human) is an immediate concern and a very possible outcome of the climate crisis, unless significant action is taken by all. With this in mind, the ‘Extinctions and Rebellions’ symposium will think about the varied cultural discourses of extinction, past and present. It will not only be a platform to discuss current environmental and ecological concerns of the Anthropocene in the cultural imagination, but it also offers a space to think about how previous literary and scientific forms have imagined extinction as a process or finality, and how these conversations speak to and could offer a means to think about our current climate crisis. Moreover, we will explore ‘extinction’ and ‘rebellion’ as they pertain to questions of literary form and scientific theory and practice. This one-day event will allow postgraduates, early-career researchers, and academics to think about how the sciences and humanities can work together, inform, and facilitate the “clear language” needed to rebel against human and non-human extinction.

## CALL FOR PAPERS PUBLIC HEALTH, PRIVATE ILLNESS: ECR MEDICAL HUMANITIES CONFERENCE WEDNESDAY 8TH AND THURSDAY 9TH APRIL 2020 KELVIN HALL, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

<https://phpiglasgow.wixsite.com/website> | [PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com](mailto:PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com) | [@phpi\\_glasgow](https://twitter.com/phpi_glasgow)

**Deadline for abstracts: midnight Friday 29th November 2019**

Public Health, Private Illness is a two-day interdisciplinary medical humanities conference for early career researchers and postgraduate students.

We live in a climate of public health crises. Debates rage over the future of the NHS. Vaccination has become politicised. Concerns are mounting about emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance in an age of globalisation. At the same time, new ways of conceiving of health and illness at an individual level have emerged. Neoliberal policy focuses on individual risk and lifestyle interventions. Social movements like neurodiversity, mad pride, or body positivity challenge medical discourses and rework difference as identity rather than pathology.

We want to interrogate the public/private distinction within health, medicine, and wellbeing, and to examine the many and complex intersections between public health ideals and the individual experience of health, illness, body, and mind. We are particularly interested in debating marginalised and non-traditional perspectives on what can sometimes be a well-trodden debate.

Alongside panels, the conference includes a number of optional and less formal sessions on the conference theme. These include: a book-making workshop, a zine handling and discussion workshop, a creative writing workshop, a museum object-handling session, and a death cafe discussion.

We are also hosting a poetry and fiction reading event on the Wednesday evening (venue TBC). This event is open to the public and will allow us to explore creative responses to the conference theme in a more informal, non-academic context. More information to follow soon for those interested in reading their work at this event.

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr Chisomo Kalinga, University of Edinburgh - ‘No man is an island’: Understanding Indigenous and African perspectives of personal wellbeing within Global Health Studies

**Possible topics:** We are open to proposals from a variety of backgrounds and time periods from scholars whose work concerns issues of health, illness, medicine and care. This includes cultural, literary, historical, linguistic, philosophical, theological, and political approaches as well as practice-based responses to the theme and humanities work from within medical and veterinary science and practice. All approaches are welcome.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- public health campaigns and social health movements, including those which challenge medical discourses
- conceptions of health, fitness and wellbeing
- body, mind, and (inter)subjectivity
- issues of conformism and resistance within medicine
- health inequalities and stigma
- nursing and other modes of care; the role of allied health care professionals
- mental health, madness and psychological disorder
- dying, death, hospice and end-of-life care

**Abstracts:** We welcome modes of presentation beyond conventional 20-minute papers including readings, performances, displays, and posters as well as less formal 10-minute papers as provocations for discussion. Proposals for 20-minute papers or 10-minute provocations should include a 250-word abstract and a 100-word biography with contact information. Proposals for other formats should include a title, brief description, and 100-word biography with contact details. Please do not feel constrained by the conventions of your discipline. All submissions and enquiries should be sent to [PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com](mailto:PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com). The deadline for submission is **midnight Friday 29th November 2019**.

**Cost:** This conference is **free to attend**. In addition, a limited number of **travel bursaries** are available. If you wish to be considered for a bursary, please include a 100-word justification with your proposal, outlining how you will be travelling to the conference and how attending is relevant to your studies/career.

**Venue:** The conference will be held at Kelvin Hall in Glasgow's West End, minutes away from the University of Glasgow. It is easily accessible: the [Kelvin Hall travel guide](#) includes detailed information about travel by bus, car, foot, bicycle, train and subway.

**Accessibility:** Kelvin Hall is fully wheelchair accessible. There is a hearing assistance system for the lecture theatre and step free access to the speaker's area. There is an onsite quiet room, a parents' room and accessible changing room. Please view the [Kelvin hall floor plan](#) or the [Accessible guide](#) (which includes detailed information and photographs) for more information. Contact us at [PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com](mailto:PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com) if you would like to discuss your accessibility needs further.

**Organisers:** This conference is organised by the [Medical Humanities ECR Group](#) at the Medical Humanities Research Centre, University of Glasgow. It is generously funded by the University of Glasgow's College of Arts and the British Society for Literature and Science.

**Any questions,** please contact us at [PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com](mailto:PHPIGlasgow@gmail.com)

## EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT BSLS CONTRIBUTION TO THE 'ENGLISH: SHARED FUTURES 2' CONFERENCE MANCHESTER, 26-28 JUNE 2020

BSLS will be proposing two panels to the 'English: Shared Futures 2' conference in Manchester next year, following the Society's successful panel at the first 'Shared Futures' in 2017. The first will be a general panel on the latest research in literature and science, consisting of 5 x 10-minute papers followed by Q&A. The second is a roundtable, 'Turning English into STEAM: what can English do with Science - for schools, universities and the public?', which will seek to showcase (and encourage further) outward-facing work by our members, and will involve 5 speakers.

Details regarding the conference itself can be found at <https://www.englishsharedfutures.uk/>

Congratulations to  
Dr. Franziska E. Kohlt  
on the completion of her doctorate (Brasenose College,  
Oxford):

“More than a figment of scientific fancy’: Dreams and  
visions in Victorian psychology and fantastic literature,  
1858-1900”

**CALL FOR PAPERS**  
**BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE**  
**FIFTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE,**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD, 15-17 APRIL 2020**

The fifteenth annual conference of the British Society for Literature and Science will be held at the University of Sheffield from Wednesday 15 April until Friday 17 April 2020.

Keynote speakers will be Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell (Oxford), Professor Martin Willis (Cardiff), and Professor Angela Wright (Sheffield).

The BSLS invites proposals for 20-minute papers, panels of three papers, or special roundtables on any subjects within the field of science (including medicine and technology), and literatures in the broadest sense, including theatre, film, and television.

The conference will include a visit to the [Alfred Denny Zoological Museum](#) (pictured), and the [Turner Museum of Glass](#) will host a keynote lecture and the wine reception.

Please send an abstract (200 words) and short biographical note (50 words) to Katherine Ebury and Helena Ifill at [shefbsls2020@gmail.com](mailto:shefbsls2020@gmail.com) by **no later than 18.00 GMT on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> of December**. Please include the abstract and biographical note in the body of the email.

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 registration fees 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).



## FUTURE BSLS CONFERENCES

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

BSLS 15, SHEFFIELD, 15-17 APRIL 2020

BSLS 16, EDINBURGH NAPIER, 8-10 APRIL 2021