



The British Society for
LITERATURE
and **SCIENCE**

*Dr Greg Lynall (University of Liverpool), Chair; Dr Rachel Crossland (University of Chichester), Secretary;
Dr Michael Whitworth (Merton College), Treasurer; Dr Will Tattersdill (University of Birmingham), Communications Officer;
Dr Emily Alder (Edinburgh Napier University), Membership Secretary;
Dr Franziska Kohlt (Brasenose College) Book Reviews Editor.
Members at Large: Dr Chisomo Kalinga (University of Edinburgh); Dr Ros Powell (University of Bristol);
Early Career Member at Large: Dr Rachel Murray (Loughborough University);
Overseas Representatives: Dr Liliane Campos (Sorbonne Nouvelle University) Europe;
Dr Jenni Halpin (Savannah State University), North America, Newsletter Editor.*

CONFERENCE NOTES

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

4-6 APRIL 2019

ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The 2019 BSLS conference offered a wide range of perspectives on the intersections between literature and science—from AI narratives to environmental encounters, televisual perspectives on science to formalisation in modernist poetics, to name but a few panels. Indeed, following ‘The State of the Unions’ special issue of the *Journal of Literature and Science* in 2017, the ways in which scholars should approach the very idea of an ‘intersection’ or an ‘interdisciplinary’ approach were often called into question over the course of the conference. For a PhD student like myself, it was fascinating to see the broad scope of approaches and perspectives currently brought to the study of literature and science. It was helpful to attend a conference where the more historicist critical approach shared a stage with more theoretically

inclined work. Here, I would like to engage with Anirudh Sridhar’s point from a review of last year’s BSLS conference at Oxford Brooks, in which he claims that literature and science is an area that has an ‘overwhelming focus on historicism, which is an indication of the general tendency of the discipline’. Though, at least from what I can tell, this largely remains the case, many researchers seem keen to challenge the limitations of the historicist project, with ecocritical approaches suggesting a growing, necessary commitment to environmentalist praxis and political action. This exciting movement was exemplified by Clare Brant’s and Angélique Richardson’s provocative keynote talks.

As it is of course impossible to summarise the conference in its entirety, I will, in order to give a sense of my own experience, briefly outline some of the talks and panels that I was able to attend over the three days. Firstly, Professor Tim Armstrong’s talk on ‘Mathematical Modernism’ opened the conference with a thorough historicist approach that incorporated clever archival work to offer new readings of George Oppen’s and Laura Riding’s poetry. Afterwards, I attended an excellent panel on ‘Formal Modernism’, in which Daniel Rhodes and Christian R. Gelder provided fascinating new ways of approaching form and formalisation in modernist poetics. Complementing Rhodes’s readings of Ezra Pound’s employment of the term ‘pure form’ in *The Cantos*, Gelder’s readings of Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s scientifically informed, and perhaps hitherto

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

Spring 2019 Newsletter

understudied, poems were suggestive and insightful. These two papers opened up a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of form itself. The next panel on ‘AI Narratives’ was, though a swift departure from the previous two talks on modernist poets, an intriguing insight into the kind of cutting-edge and interdisciplinary work being conducted at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence in Cambridge.

Josh Powell, Thalia Trigoni, and Max Chapnick formed a compelling panel on ‘Mindful Mapping’, which moved from Thomas Hardy’s *Return of the Native* to D. H. Lawrence’s interest in unconscious thought, through to Samuel Beckett’s and Ann Quin’s engagement with twentieth century psychology. The three talks complemented each other extremely well, offering a chronological progression from the nineteenth century novel through to post-war experimental writing. Indeed, throughout the conference, the mixture of different periods and topics of discussion was admirable, often allowing for academics to hear from researchers working outside of their own specialist period. In fact, my own talk on John Ruskin and Marcel Proust’s uses of scientific lenses followed an intriguing paper by Rosalind Powell on eighteenth century poetry and astronomy, which brought out surprising and useful parallels between the two. Above all, then, I would like to extend my thanks the BSLS and particularly to the conference organiser, Mike Wainwright, for facilitating an excellent conference that brought together a very friendly and encouraging group of researchers.

Patrick Armstrong, PhD Candidate
University of Cambridge

EMPATHY, AGENCY AND THE ENVIRONMENT AT BSLS 2019:

The fourteenth annual conference of the British Society for Literature and Science took place at Royal Holloway University from 4-6 April 2019. Thirty-two panels reflected a variety of topics, from plague to climate change to extended cognition and agency.

Having a recently joined the society, this was my first foray into the BSLS community. I was delighted to present research into fiction’s effects on empathy on a panel with Helen Goodman, who examined portrayals of grief in the work of Dickens, and Linda Horsnell, who interpreted Joyce’s “Eveline” using Bowlby’s attachment theory. The relationship among attachment, empathy, and grief enabled a dialogue about emotion and identification which continued beyond the close of the conference. As an experimental psychologist, I was conscious that my approach might feel out of place, or that my methods might be seen to perpetuate divisions between science and literature, but I found that beyond epistemological differences were shared beliefs in the value of literature to understanding the world.

A theme of the conference that I noticed was the environment, particularly the function of literature in narrating and constructing our understanding of climate change. In an engaging keynote in Royal Holloway’s awesome Founders Building, Clare Brant showed how in recent years the call-to-arms discourse surrounding climate change has become increasingly anthropocentric: if we don’t do something, it’s not only polar bears that will be gone—humans will too. It’s no longer enough to present the plight of the polar bears; the message is now about risk and limitation to human agency.

In the *Embodiments of Illness* strand, Natalie Riley’s talk foregrounded the tendency to consider agency as something located within bounded (usually by skin) organisms. She discussed Sarah Hall’s *Evie*, whose agency becomes disrupted through interactions with her body and changes to it (her skin-boundary literally alters as a result of her new-found lust for chocolate) and ultimately through the discovery of a personality-altering tumour. Perhaps agency that expands to encompass the environment beyond the skin boundary, or genuinely non-human others such as those of China Miéville’s *Embassy Town* (the language of which was discussed by Zoë Lehmann Imfeld in the *Language: Metaphysical and Philosophical* panel) can examine and develop attitudes towards others in and of nature.

A colleague asked me: “isn’t your work somewhat anthropocentric? Have you considered empathy for non-human animals, or the environment?” On reflection, it seems that a timely next step in scientific studies of literature and investigations of science through literature might be to explore how empathy for non-human animals, and even non-living objects, can be promoted via immersion in, or discussion about, fictional narratives.

I left the conference with new contacts and potential collaborators, as well as several book recommendations and ideas for experimental work with new narrative stimuli. I’m hugely grateful to the welcoming community at BSLS and particularly Mike Wainwright for his work organising a truly inspirational three days.

Rose Turner
Kingston University London



MEMBER ENGAGEMENTS

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND SCIENCE SEMINAR

On 22 February 2019 a research seminar on Children's Literature and Science was held at Edinburgh Napier University. BSLS members Melanie Keene, Jen Baker, Fran Kohlt and Chloé Germaine Buckley presented on their current research investigating intersections between science and children's literature, followed by a roundtable discussion between Emily Alder, Kanta Dihal, Will Tattersdill and Laurence Talairach on the subject of 'Children's literature and science: learning or entertainment?'

Melanie explored the history of Noah's Ark toys for nineteenth-century children. Noah's Ark was taken to be a literal event in children's books and games, which blurred real history with myth, and children's play with these models often differed from the original educational intentions. Jen exhibited some recent interactive books based on *Frankenstein* such as *The Secret Journals of Victor Frankenstein* (2009) which aim to teach anatomy to young readers. She compared this technique to Victorian anatomists who turned to methods of mass entertainment to disseminate their work. Fran discussed the contradictory contemporary discourses surrounding children and their relationship to nature. She suggested that trans-disciplinary responses and even a re-orientation of literary studies could aid comprehension of children's literature and its relationship to the natural environment, particularly climate change fiction. Chloé's paper theorised philosophical approaches to time in gothic children's fiction. She argued for an acknowledgement of the inequalities of the past, as well as an ethical reading of the past in children's literature studies.

During the roundtable, Will reflected on ideas of the imaginary and the real which permeate children's cultures, while Kanta emphasised the ways in which AI is increasingly becoming a part of children's lives. Emily and Laurence discussed how the presence of science affects the relationship between instruction and amusement in children's literature, which ultimately led to a discussion on the constructedness of the fictional child and alternatives to constructivism where children are concerned.



Follow us on Twitter @ChildLitSci, and email any enquiries to childlitsci@gmail.com.

*Lois Burke, ChildLitSci Research Assistant
Edinburgh Napier University*

HOW TO WORK WITH SCIENTISTS

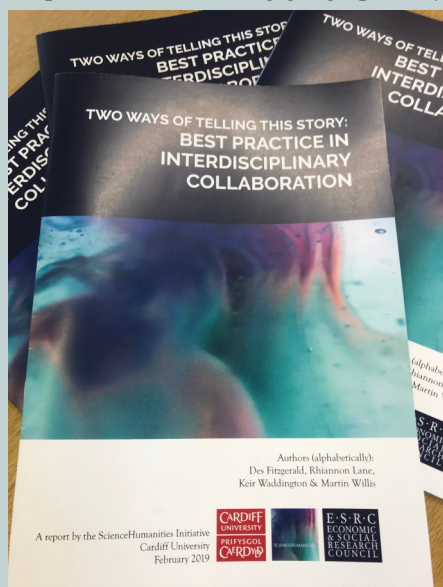
The ScienceHumanities Initiative at Cardiff University, of which we are all members, has recently completed an ESRC-funded project to examine collaborative research in the UK that worked explicitly across the humanities and the sciences. One of our first published outputs is a report on Best Practice in Interdisciplinary Collaboration that examines, using data from existing projects, cross-disciplinary collaborations. The report provides a list of what we see as the ideal ingredients for a successful collaboration between the humanities and the sciences. This includes, for example, the importance of working geographically proximate to one another (the kind of thing that funders always strive to unpick).

For further tips on ideal projects you will have to ask us for a copy of the report!

We also focus on barriers to success in cross-disciplinary projects, and give lots of examples of what can go wrong and why. Finally we talk about the benefits of projects like this—for the research itself, of course, but also for the researcher herself. The report is rounded off with two exemplary case studies: one of a project that worked brilliantly and one from a project that was disastrous. These are well worth reading, and provide additional food for thought.

If you would like a copy of the report, entirely free, please contact Martin Willis on willism8@cardiff.ac.uk

Martin Willis, Des Fitzgerald, Rhiannon Lane, and Keir Waddington



BSLS BOOK PRIZE

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES AND SCIENCE

The 2018 British Society for Literature and Science book prize goes to John Holmes for *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science* (Yale University Press).

The Pre-Raphaelites and Science is a beautifully written and illustrated book which synthesizes a remarkable range of fields to produce a rich exploration of artistic and scientific relations in the nineteenth century. The book makes a substantial contribution to the history of literature, art, science, and museums, and will raise awareness amongst scholars and more general readers of the critical insights which arise from a literature and science approach.

Also shortlisted this year:

Rachel Crossland, *Modernist Physics: Waves, Particles, and Relativities in the Writings of Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence* (Oxford University Press)

Julia Miele Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances: Theorizing Autism Poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe* (University of Michigan Press)

Richard C. Sha, *Imagination and Science in Romanticism* (Johns Hopkins University Press)

Megan Ward, *Seeming Human: Artificial Intelligence and Victorian Realist Character* (The Ohio State University Press)

DEGREE AWARDED

I was awarded my PhD in Creative Writing as Science Communication from the University of Winchester, in February 2019. My thesis, 'Writing Genetic Science-Inspired Fiction in Contemporary Society', concentrates jointly on the theory and contextualisation of writing fiction as science communication, and the practice of writing genetic fiction (under the term 'science-as-fiction'). The creative practice (practice-as-research) undertaken for the doctorate produced a collection of original novelettes and novellas that explore and speculate through contemporary and near-future fiction, the possible impacts and consequences of manipulating genetic code.

Through an informed exercise in creating and writing original fiction about characters and issues involved in contemporary and near-future science, this practice-based thesis examines how the representation of scientific knowledge can be critically explored through creative writing and fiction grounded in science, specifically genetic science. The creative element of this research is presented as a themed or linked collection of genetic science-inspired speculative fiction in the form of two novelettes and one novella. These collected works present opportunities to explore scientific, ethical, and moral issues within the area of contemporary-facing genetic science through fiction. The activity of engaging with science and science-related characters via an empirical investigation is explored within each individual creative piece.

As objects of creative production, these works offer both the experience of engaging with science-related characters as they pursue scientific (and personal) goals, and an opportunity to explore a variety of implications and possibilities of (genetic) science in contemporary society. This approach allows investigation through a range of methods to examine a creative process from a critical perspective using practice-as-research methodology. Individually, a close-examination and commentary is offered on the interaction between storyline, science elements, characters, and characterisations. Through this exploration a critical analysis is delivered on the influence of science in the design and writing of the fiction collection.

With the completion of the creative and critical elements of this thesis, a research study rooted as much in process as on focused outcome is established. The creative practice is seen to critically inform how a factually inspired genetic science work of fiction is delivered and as such, the thesis introduces a model that can be applied by other academics and practitioners working within the fields of contemporary fiction and science.

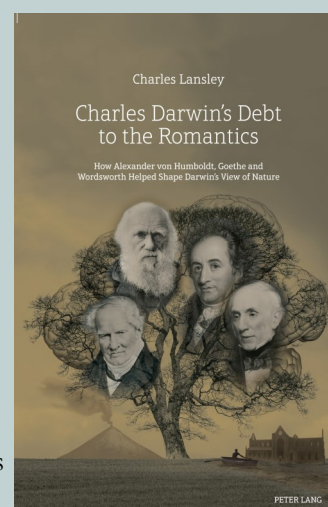
Sean A Fitzgerald

RECENT PUBLICATION

Charles Morris Lansley. *Charles Darwin's Debt to the Romantics: How Alexander von Humboldt, Goethe and Wordsworth Helped Shape Darwin's View of Nature*. Peter Lang. August 2018. (ISBN 978-1-78707-138-4)

The author traces the influences that contributed to the development of Charles Darwin's imagination leading to his theory of natural selection. This asks the question of whether they could be regarded as Romantic and square with Darwin being a Victorian naturalist and gentleman.

Darwin took Alexander von Humboldt's Personal Narrative with him on the Beagle and this is analysed alongside Darwin's works to identify any influences. Darwin refers to the concept of 'archetype' a number of times in his *Origin* and this is examined to see if he might have been influenced by Goethe's use of the concept. If so, could Darwin have been influenced by the German Romantics? Darwin also refers to the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth in his notebooks, yet in his Autobiography he describes all poetry as creating a feeling of nausea. The author looks into this contradiction to see if Romantic poetry had an effect on Darwin's imagination. Darwin also denied that his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had had any influence on him. The author analyses his poetry to trace any influences and whether any of these could be regarded as strengthening the view that Charles Darwin was Romantic. The book cleverly follows Darwin's form of the narrative in searching for traces of history both in science and poetry, and this is achieved with the same inspired imagination as Darwin's.



UPCOMING EVENT



BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE

Sorbonne Nouvelle University, 7 June 2019
Organisers: Dr Liliane Campos and Dr Pierre-Louis Patoine

We are pleased to announce two upcoming symposia on biological perspectives in contemporary literature and performance. The first symposium, 'New Scales', will take place in June 2019, the second, 'New Images', will take place in June 2020. The programme for the first event is now online at <https://litorg.hypotheses.org/>. All are welcome at the Institut du Monde Anglophone, 5 rue de l'école de médecine, 75005 Paris.

CALLS FOR PAPERS AND PROPOSALS

BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM, 2019

Expressions of interest are invited by **1 June** for the BSLS Winter Symposium in 2019. As members will recall, this is a postgraduate and early career researcher-led event and presents a great opportunity to run a successful event at this stage in your career (with help and support from the BSLS Committee throughout the process).

Proposals are invited for a themed one-day event to take place in or about November, to be emailed to Rachel Murray at r.e.murray@lboro.ac.uk. As ever, it is hoped that the event will have a 'non-conference' feel, and will include different types of papers, panels, and ways of sharing knowledge. Proposals should be no longer than two sides of A4, and should include a theme and description, details of the organising group and location, potential speakers (if known) and types of papers, panels or other sessions to be included. The BSLS will award around £500, depending on the budget required, in support of the symposium, which should be free to attend if possible.

CFP FROM ECRs—NARRATIVE SCIENCE IN TECHNO-ENVIRONMENTS— 18-19 JULY 2019 (LONDON)

This two-day interdisciplinary workshop is made possible thanks to the generous support of the British Academy (grant number BARSEA19\190021). It expands on the work of the Narrative Science project, a European Research Council funded project based at the London School of Economics (grant agreement No. 694732). It will take place in London on the 18th-19th of July.

The aim is to create a platform and a network for research at the intersections of the history of science and technology, literary studies, and the environmental humanities. The shared focus is accordingly on narrative, science, and environmental history. To these ends we are proud to have partnered with both the British Society for the History of Science and the British Society for Literature and Science. We have already gathered a range of expert speakers, who are listed alongside the titles of their talks at the bottom of this message. Further information about the workshop motivations and agenda can be found on the web page: <https://www.narrative-science.org/events-narrative-science-project-workshops-environment.html>

In addition, as part of our networking, this event is organised in collaboration with 'Environment, Climate, and Heredity: the integration of environmental humanities with the history of heredity' to take place on the following Saturday, 20 July, at Oxford, organised by Dr John Lidwell-Durnin. Further details will be announced soon.



Call for ECR presenters with posters - Deadline 24 May

A key ambition of this workshop is to provide a platform and network for early career researchers (ECRs). For our purposes ECRs are defined as postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers not yet in permanent employment. There are 20 spaces available for ECRs across the two days. Each ECR presenter will have 10 minutes to speak about their work in a dedicated slot during the workshop plenary sessions, and will also provide a poster which will be showcased during the evening reception on 18 July. The poster reception will be an opportunity to talk directly and informally with all the other attendees in a relaxed atmosphere. All of the plenary sessions will be video recorded and eventually made available on the Narrative Science project website. At the moment we can only promise to reimburse hotel and travel expenses for these 20 ECRs up to £100, but we intend to increase this amount as much as possible. All catering is supplied to attendees across the two days free of charge, and we will also take care of the costs of poster printing. ECRs who are members of the BSHS may also be eligible to apply for a Butler-Eyles Travel Grant towards their travel costs.

To apply to the workshop please write to the organiser, Dr Dominic Berry, on d.j.berry@lse.ac.uk. In the email subject please write 'Your name - Environment workshop ECR', and in the message include:

- Your status as independent scholar or affiliated with a particular institution/university.
- Maximum 200 words on how this workshop relates to your ongoing research.
- Maximum 100 words on the kinds of material and arrangement you expect to include on your poster.

Interested parties should obviously also feel free to contact us for any further information!

Confirmed Speakers

- Jon Agar (UCL) - "British Nature was Lost Here, 1964-71": what's at stake when scientists, nature writers and bureaucrats tell stories

- Dominic J. Berry (LSE) - Narrative science in techno-environments
- Animesh Chatterjee (Leeds Trinity University) - Urban, political and cultural environments in late-19th century Bengali anticolonial representations of electricity
- Jean-Baptiste Gouyon (UCL) - Wildlife conservation as a cinematic project?
- Alex Hall (University of Birmingham) - Who speaks for the flood? Exploring agency, expectations and the supernatural in extreme weather events
- John Lidwell-Durnin (University of Oxford) - "Have they remained what they were in Europe?": narrative, organisms, and environment in explorations of South America
- Ina Linge (University of Exeter) - Narrating Human-animal Sexual Nature in 1920s Popular Science Books
- Greg Lynall (University of Liverpool) - Reading Renewables: Stories of Solar Power
- Harriet Ritvo (MIT) - The Stakes of Species
- Anahita Rouyan (Independent scholar and consultant) - Producing Mutations: Scientific Plant Breeding and Narratives of Nature in the Progressive-Era United States, 1900-1914
- Charlotte Sleight (University of Kent) - Sugar in the air: carbon narratives, futures and endings
- sam smiley (Astrodime Transit Authority) - Ornamentalism: The Migrations and Translations of Japanese Knotweed

***JLS*/BSLS ESSAY PRIZE**

Following the success of the *JLS*/BSLS essay prize in previous years, The *JLS* and the British Society for Literature and Science would like to announce the 2019 prize for the best new essay by an early career scholar on a topic within the field of literature and science.

Essays should be currently unpublished and not under consideration by another journal. They should be approx. 8,000 words long, inclusive of references, and should be sent by email to both Will Tattersdill, Communications Officer of the BSLS (w.j.tattersdill@bham.ac.uk), and Martin Willis, Editor of the *JLS* (willism8@cardiff.ac.uk), by 12 noon on **Friday, 30 August 2019**

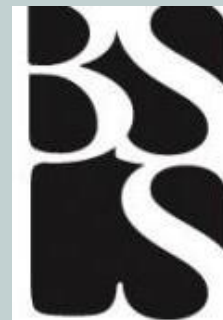
The prize is open to BSLS members who are postgraduate students or have completed a doctorate within three years of this date.

(To join BSLS, go to <http://www.bsls.ac.uk/join-us/>).

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

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

(The judges reserve the right not to award the prize should no essay of a high enough standard be submitted.)



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