



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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Members at Large: Dr Chisomo Kalinga (University of Edinburgh); Sara Cole (Lancaster University);
Early Career Member at Large: Dr Rachel Murray (University of Sheffield);
Overseas Representative, Europe: Dr Liliane Campos (Sorbonne Nouvelle University).*

CONFERENCE NOTES

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

7-9 APRIL, MANCHESTER

As a first-time attendee of the BSLS conference, I found it full of fascinating and thought-provoking moments, with a few memorable spots of humour. The diversity of panel topics was impressive, ranging from forests to dinosaurs, from science-fiction visions to Covid-19 responses, and from Humphry Davy's notebooks to the Anthropocene. Choosing which panels to attend was, unsurprisingly, a difficult decision, as every topic seemed intriguing. I particularly enjoyed the Davy Transcribe-a-Thon, which challenged us to decipher Davy's handwriting and reveal his thoughts on electrochemistry. Another stimulating event was John Holmes' and Barri Gold's panel on Gaia and the Anthropocene, where they inspired us to think about the opportunities we have as literary critics and teachers to direct our readers and students to the story of the environment, as well as the story of humanity.

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

Spring 2022 Newsletter

The plenaries were similarly diverse, and they provided striking highlights to the conference that connected key themes and engaged our imaginations. Leah Knight kicked off the conference with a discussion of Hester Pulter's verse and how it reflects the science of the seventeenth-century world. Pulter frequently engages in thought experiments, drawing from a variety of scientific sources to speculate about ideas as mind-blowing as the plurality of worlds. Of special interest were Pulter's references to obscure animals such as the su—a chimeric beast said to carry its young on its back. On Friday evening, Susan M. Gaines' plenary took us on a journey through her life, reviewing through her eyes the development of the science novel as a genre and suggesting a plethora of books for future reading. She also spoke on how to write about nature in the Anthropocene, and what role, if any, activism can play in novel-writing. Finally, Shital Pravinchandra closed the conference by challenging us to think about the ethics of saving life—to what extent might our concepts of care be informed by colonial practices? Using texts such as Ann Patchet's *State of Wonder*, Pravinchandra explored the nuances of aid and exploitation, questioning what it means to serve life.

It was refreshing to be amongst physical people with the freedom to converse, make connections, and sample a never-ending array of sandwiches. The conference organizers put on several fantastic events that provided further opportunity to socialize. The Thursday evening social was both entertaining and

educational, as it provided an opportunity for PGRs and ECRs to network and hear advice from more knowledgeable researchers. In speed-dating style, we raced from table to table, sharing experiences and trading stories. The socializing continued on Friday night with a Chinese feast at Little Yang Sing, where we heard the exciting announcement that Barri Gold won the book prize with her work *Energy, Ecocriticism, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies* (Palgrave, 2021), which is definitely now on my reading list (along with a number of other texts that came up over the course of the conference!).

As a new attendee, I am supremely grateful to all the returning BSLS members who made the conference a welcoming, lively, and encouraging experience. Finally, thanks to the conference organizers, especially Jerome de Groot, who worked so hard for this rousing in-person revival of the BSLS conference.

—Anna McCullough

I was one of the lucky four researchers to be awarded a postgraduate bursary for the conference this year. Rosie Crocker, Anna McCullough, Claudia Sterbini and I had several lively meetings both with Jerome de Groot and amongst ourselves, to figure out how best to contribute content during and after the conference that would make everyone feel welcome and included. It was an excellent opportunity for four conference newbies to get involved and we are all grateful to the BSLS for the funding, as well as the help and encouragement we received along the way. Sadly, Claudia was unable to attend the conference in the end, which was disappointing for all of us, especially her.

Rosie embraced the role of live tweeting the event

with gusto; apart from when she was delivering her own paper, she was to be found composing detailed and fascinating micro-reports. Her tweets on the roundtable ‘Imperfect Futures: Imagining Responses to Covid in the 2020s’ were (almost) as good as being there. Anna and I took on the task of filming interviews with the plenary speakers using only our phones and the patience and the goodwill of Susan Gaines, Leah Knight and Shital Pravinchandra, all of whom were generous with their time and thoughtfulness. The interviews can be found on the BSLS Vimeo channel, where you will also find a very interesting interview with BSLS Chair Jenni Halpin. If you are interested in getting your work published, have a listen to my chat with Matthew Frost, Senior Commissioning Editor for Literature, Theatre and Film at the Manchester University Press.

Our other, equally enjoyable and interesting, role was to make sure everyone had a good time at the conference. It was also an easy job; we rarely found people standing around looking lost or lonely. Everyone seemed determined to make the most of their opportunity to network and chat, as evidenced by the background noise on the interviews. Sometimes it was hard to hear ourselves speak, such was the enthusiasm and joy at finding ourselves in a congenial group after two years on Zoom and Teams. Many attendees commented on the friendly and welcoming atmosphere throughout the conference, saying that BSLS is the most sociable and supportive academic society they know. It was a good start for us, and we already have the dates of the 2023 conference in our diaries.

—Sara Cole

CALL FOR ORGANISERS: BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM 2022

AN ONLINE EVENT

PROPOSALS DUE BY 30 JUNE

The Winter Symposium is an annual PGR/ECR-led event, with a specific theme proposed by the organisers. This year, the BSLS members at the annual conference expressed particular interest in

- the Anthropocene,
- the Material,
- the Visual, or
- Translation.

While proposals focused on one of these themes would be particularly welcomed, we encourage potential organisers to move forward with any theme associated with literature and science.

Proposals are invited from postgraduates, and from early career researchers who were recently postgraduates, for a one-day online event on a discrete theme to take place in or around November 2022.

Proposals should be no longer than two sides of A4, and should include a description of the event, details of the

organisers, potential speakers (if known) and types of papers, panels or other sessions to be included.

The symposium might also cover research training and career advice alongside showcasing ongoing research. It is hoped that each event will have a ‘non-conference’ feel, and include different types of papers, panels, and ways of sharing knowledge.

The BSLS Executive Committee will support the organisers throughout the process in both administrative and technical matters.

The BSLS will award around £500 in support of the symposium, which should be free to attend if possible.

Proposals should be emailed to Rachel Murray (Rachel.E.Murray@sheffield.ac.uk) by the 30th of June.

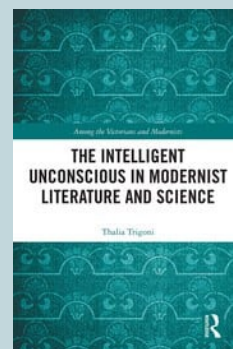
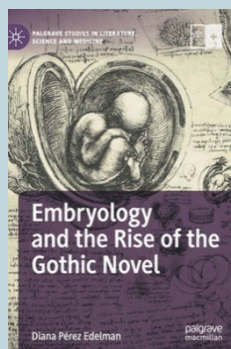
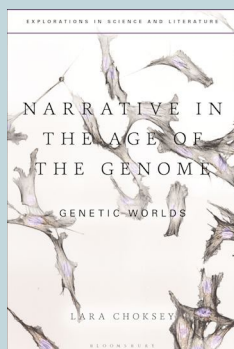
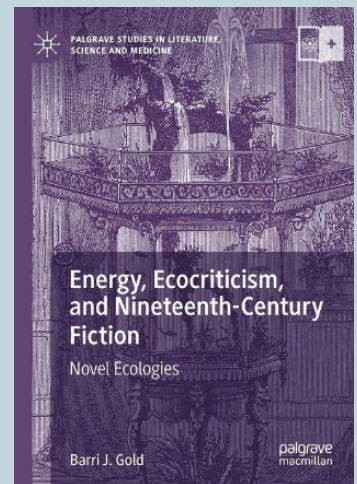
Applications for BSLS Small Grants to facilitate and promote the study of literature and science and for BSLS bursaries to support postgraduate student members and early career researchers are now accepted quarterly, by the first of March, June, September, and December. See the [funding](#) section of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

THE BSLS BOOK PRIZE FOR 2021

At our banquet in April the committee announced that Barri Gold was awarded the BSLS book prize for 2021 for her monograph *Energy, Ecocriticism, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies* (Palgrave). The committee remarked that “This book deploys energy physics to think about ecology and to rethink the novel form; a direct, refreshing read that challenges readers to act differently in their scholarship and offers methodologies for doing so.”

The short list included three further outstanding books:

- Lara Choksey, *Narrative in the Age of the Genome: Genetic Worlds* (Bloomsbury)
“Original work opening new ground for the field, this study lucidly presents an ambitious and compelling argument about the relations between the genome and narrative.”
- Diana Perez Edelman, *Embryology and the Rise of the Gothic Novel* (Palgrave)
“This excellent piece of literature and science scholarship offers a thoroughly historically informed analysis of classic Gothic works, arguing persuasively for the Gothic as an inherently embryological genre.”
- Thalia Tragoni, *The Intelligent Unconscious in Modernist Literature and Science* (Routledge)
“This is an exciting study, offering fresh and challenging readings of Lawrence, Woolf, and others who not only wrote about but also theorised modules of intelligent unconscious.”



RECENT PUBLICATIONS

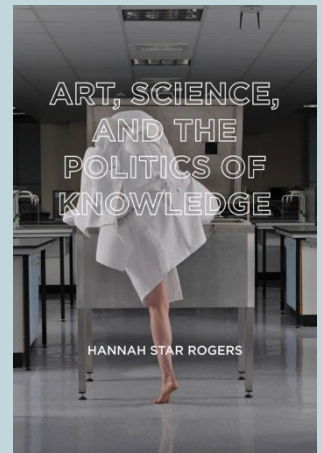
Jennifer Leetsch. “Mary Seacole’s Plant Matter(s): Vegetal Entanglements of the Black Atlantic in *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*.” *EJES: The European Journal of English Studies*. 26:1, 42–65. DOI: 10.1080/13825577.2022.2044145

This article offers a new reading of Mary Seacole’s autobiography from the perspective of material ecocriticism. The Black Atlantic origins of Seacole’s pharmacopoeia reveal a troubled, complex engagement with histories of medicine and cure, with local indigenous knowledges, and with the often-violent circulation of plants and people across the planet. Paying close attention to instances in the text when plants meld and move with humans, within and beyond the Atlantic medical complex, the article links together vegetal materiality and medical, botanical histories of slavery, the plantation, and resistant black ecologies. To foreground the vibrant plant-human encounters at work in the text, the article selects three plants from Seacole’s medicine chest and follows their routes across the Black Atlantic, articulating how Seacole used her pharmacopoeia to save white Anglo patients while inadvertently addressing the long histories of slavery and colonialism.

Hannah Star Rogers. *Art, Science, and the Politics of Knowledge*. MIT Press, 2022.

In *Art, Science, and the Politics of Knowledge*, Hannah Star Rogers suggests that art and science are not as different from each other as we might assume. She shows how the tools of science and technology studies (STS) can be applied to artistic practice, offering new ways of thinking about people and objects that have largely fallen outside the scope of STS research. Arguing that the categories of art and science are labels with specific powers to order social worlds—and that art and science are best understood as networks that produce knowledge—Rogers shows, through a series of cases, the similarities and overlapping practices of these knowledge communities.

The cases, which range from nineteenth-century artisans to contemporary bioartists, illustrate how art can provide the basis for a new subdiscipline called art, science, and technology studies (ASTS), offering hybrid tools for investigating art–science collaborations. Rogers’s subjects include the work of father and son glassblowers, the Blaschkas, whose glass models, produced in the nineteenth century for use in biological classification, are now displayed as works of art; the physics photographs of documentary photographer Berenice Abbott; and a bioart lab that produces work functioning as both artwork and scientific output. Finally, Rogers, an STS scholar and contemporary art-science curator, draws on her own work to consider the concept of curation as a form of critical analysis.



UPCOMING EVENT

Pinter & Martin London will be holding the launch party for Antonella Gambotto-Burke’s forthcoming book, *Apple: Sex, Drugs, Motherhood and the Recovery of the Feminine*, a highly controversial cultural analysis of the past two centuries, on June 10 in London. To RSVP, please email info@pinterandmartin.com before the end of May.

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

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR LITERATURE AND SCIENCE AND *JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND SCIENCE* EARLY CAREER ESSAY PRIZE 2022

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 2022 prize for the best new essay by an early career scholar on any topic within the field of literature and science.

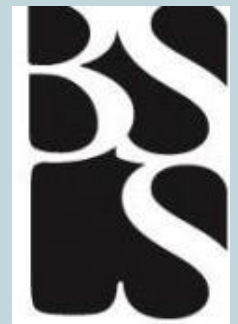
Essays should be currently unpublished and not under consideration by another journal. They should be approximately 8,000 words long, inclusive of references, and should be sent by email to both Jordan Kistler, Communications Officer of the BSLS (Jordan.kistler@strath.ac.uk), and Martin Willis, Editor of the *JLS* (willism8@cardiff.ac.uk), by 5pm on Friday, 30th September, 2022.

The prize is open to BSLS members who are postgraduate students or have completed a doctorate within three years of the submission date. (To join the 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 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).

bsls.ac.uk