



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

*Prof. Martin Willis (Cardiff University), Chair; Dr Greg Lynall (University of Liverpool), Secretary;  
Dr Michael Whitworth (Merton College), Treasurer; Dr Josie Gill (University of Bristol), Communications Officer;  
Jessica Roberts (Haelo, NHS), Membership Secretary; Dr Gavin Budge (University of Hertfordshire), Book Reviews Editor.  
Members at Large: Ros Ambler-Alderman, (University of Southampton) Early Career Member at Large;  
Dr Peter Garratt (University of Durham); Dr Ros Powell (University of Bristol).  
Overseas Representatives: Dr Maria Arxentevskaya (Max Planck Institute,) Europe;  
Dr Jenni Halpin (Savannah State University), North America, Newsletter Editor.*

## BSLS OPEN POSTS

Several of the BSLS Executive Committee posts will be vacated or up for renewal at the annual conference in April. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage any members who wish to support the Society to consider applying for these posts. They are genuinely open to all, and even if you don't think this is for you, why not send me an email to ask more about them? I would be delighted to hear from you.

These positions are:

- ◆ Chair,
- ◆ Treasurer,
- ◆ Membership Secretary,
- ◆ Book Reviews Officer,
- ◆ Member at Large, and
- ◆ Early Career Member at Large.

Present incumbents in two of the positions (Treasurer and Early Career Member at Large) are seeking to continue in their roles, but all six posts are open to nominations. We especially encourage members interested

in the four vacating posts: Chair, Membership Secretary, Book Reviews Officer, and Member at Large.

Any member of BSLS is eligible for these posts and can propose themselves or someone else. Each proposed candidate will also need two nominations from members of BSLS. These proposals and nominations should be sent both to the Chair, Martin Willis ([WillisM8@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:WillisM8@cardiff.ac.uk)), and myself, the Secretary ([gilyall@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:gilyall@liverpool.ac.uk)). Expressions of interest and proposals should be received by 23rd March at the very latest.

If you have questions about these posts, please do contact Martin or me.

*Greg Lynall  
Secretary*

## FROM THE CONSTITUTION

### 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.

*Winter 2018 Newsletter*

# RECENT CONFERENCE

On 3-5 January 2018, the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (BSECS, for short) hosted its yearly conference in St. Hugh's College, Oxford. Open to all critical approaches, the BSECS conference has a tradition of papers inclined towards the literary. However, the theme of this year's conference, 'Truths and Lies', presented a valuable possibility to investigate how the scientific discourse contributed to construct truth in the eighteenth-century public sphere. This opportunity was not missed by Alessio Mattana, a doctoral researcher at the University of Leeds, who organized a panel titled 'Constructing Truth in a Newtonian Universe'. The aim of the panel was to explore the impact of Newton and his philosophy across Europe, and how this found representation in the literature of the age.

The three papers in the panel dialogued on the different narratives of truth that emerged from the impact of Newtonian truth. Dr Laura Miller (University of West Georgia) anatomized Francesco Algarotti's *Newtonianism for Ladies* alongside his essays on opera and theatre, showing Algarotti's attention to the gendered sociability of his audience, whereas Prof Rienk Vermij (University of Oklahoma) explored the complex ways in which, in the Dutch Republic, thinkers used Newtonian narratives to charge the followers of Spinoza of atheism; Alessio Mattana, finally, contended that popularisers in the polite circles of London made use of literary representations to construct an ideal Newtonian observer that was modest and thus reasonable.

The three contributions, and the lively discussion with the audience that followed thanks to the dynamic chairing of Dr Matthew D Eddy (Durham University), successfully brought attention to the importance of science in eighteenth-century literature. Hopefully, this will be followed by other inter-disciplinary initiatives of this kind.

*Alessio Mattana*



## BSLS GRANTS REPORT

### MALICE AND MALIGNANCY IN EARLY MODERN MEDICINE AND CULTURE

This is a project that proposes to study the meanings of the term 'malignancy' in early modern context with the purpose of exploring further its recognized affinities to both medical and cultural senses. It stems from the fact that the term denoted both a state of physiological abnormality and also a broader sense of ill will. It was, moreover, imbued with political connotations as the action of a malignant disease on the physical body was likened to the action of 'malevolent' groups on the wholeness of the body politic. In short, early modern 'malignancy' was a term that straddled the boundaries of science and culture. Its study, therefore, necessarily involves a great variety of sources—from medical to literary to political texts. It was the generous support of the Society that enabled me to access some of the rarest of these. More specifically, I was able to consult early-modern manuscript letters that provided political commentary on events of the civil war era by using the term. I was also able to gather critical information on the nature of disease—especially of malignant disease—in the early modern period by visiting specialist libraries, such as the Wellcome library. I am now working to unpack the nosological and other connotations of malignancy found in these primary sources and to better understand its uses—including its connections to the morally laden term 'malice'. A journal article on the subject is anticipated later this year. I am grateful to the Society for helping me initiate research on this project and, quite importantly, for bolstering my position as an early career researcher.

*Dr Paschalina (Lina) Minou*  
*Independent scholar*

# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

We are delighted to announce the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Literature and Science*, entitled 'Defining the Science Humanities' and edited by James Castell, Martin Willis, and Keir Waddington.

With contributions from scholars in a wide range of disciplines and from across the world, the issue proposes, defines, and explores a new terrain for thinking about the points of connection and resistance between the humanities and the sciences: the Science Humanities. Organized around triangulations, speculations, and practices, the special issue investigates an ambitious range of approaches that inform the Science Humanities and also offers a manifesto for new modes of thinking and new ways of collaborative working.

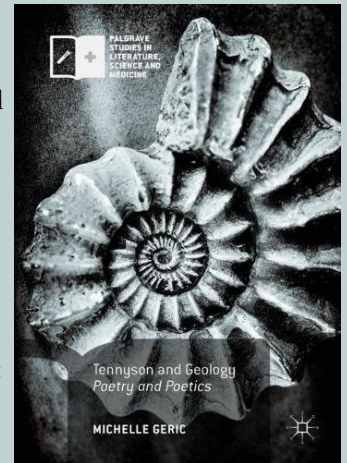
Open access to the issue is available at the following link, <http://www.literatureandscience.org/volume-10-issue-2-2017/>.



Michelle Geric. *Tennyson and Geology: Poetry and Poetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

*Tennyson and Geology* is now available. This book offers new interpretations of Tennyson's major poems along-side contemporary geology, and specifically Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-3). Employing various approaches—from close readings of both the poetic and geological texts, historical contextualisation and the application of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism—the book demonstrates not only the significance of geology for Tennyson's poetry, but the vital import of Tennyson's poetics in explicating the implications of geology for the nineteenth century and beyond. Gender ideologies in *The Princess* (1847) are read via Hugh Miller's geology, while the writings of Lyell and other contemporary geologists, comparative anatomists, and language theorists are examined alongside *In Memoriam* (1851) and *Maud* (1855). The book argues that Tennyson's experimentation with Lyell's geology produced a remarkable 'uniformitarian' poetics that is best understood via Bakhtinian theory: a poetics that reveals the seminal role methodologies in geology played in the development of divisions between science and culture, and that also, quite profoundly, anticipates the crisis in language later associated with the linguistic turn of the twentieth century.

<http://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783319661094>



Anne Barret. *Women at Imperial College: Past, Present and Future*. (World Scientific)

This series of biographies, revealing the inspirational role women have played in the legacy of Imperial College, is a celebration of women in science, technology, medicine, and business, set against the background of women and their association with Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, from its Constituent Colleges in the nineteenth century (and it being perceived as a male dominated institution) to current times when we have a woman president. Biographies, case studies and archive material provide an insight into their academic work and social lives. *Women at Imperial College* provides a comprehensive overview of student and professional life in diverse fields and subjects. Further careers as academics and businesswomen are also documented, demonstrating the importance and wider social impact of women in the sciences. (By quoting WSSPP20, you will enjoy a 20% discount.)



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## SCIENCE, MEDICINE AND CULTURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ST ANNE'S COLLEGE, OXFORD SEMINARS IN HILARY TERM 2018

Tuesday 13 February 2018 (Week 5)

**Dr Ryan Sweet, University of Leeds**

Normalcy Interrogated: Prosthetic Hand Users  
in Victorian Sensation-Fiction Narratives

5.30-7.00, Seminar Room 3, St. Anne's College, Oxford

The nineteenth century is often celebrated as a period of great innovation in artificial limbs. Not only did the century see tremendous developments in surgical practice, meaning that more amputees survived amputation and more survived with serviceable stumps able to support prosthetic limbs, but an attitude was also cultivated that increasingly privileged physical “normalcy”. As the concept of the “normal” body was constructed by contexts such as the emergence of bodily statistics, the growth of sciences that equated physical appearances with particular character traits, and changes in Poor Law legislation, it became more important than ever before for individuals to conceal bodily losses in order to avoid the stigma attached to physical difference. An emerging profession of prosthesis makers cashed in on both this growing consumer market and wider taste for physical “wholeness”—an explicit constituent of “normalcy”—by producing sophisticated artificial limbs designed to conceal limb loss (aesthetically and functionally). The products of the most successful of these limb makers, such as A. A. Marks and Frederick Gray, were celebrated by journalists and advocates on both sides of the Atlantic. In spite of such high spirits surrounding the achievements of artificial limbs, literary representations of prostheses tended to be more critical of both the efficacy of and logic underpinning such devices. Two examples of a texts that complicated the developing hegemony of physical “wholeness”—as well as the importance placed on concealing physical difference—were the sensation-fiction short stories “Lady Letitia's Lilliput Hand” (1862) by Robert William Buchanan and “Prince Rupert's Emerald Ring” (1895) by T. Lockhart. In this talk, I will argue that texts such as these challenged the status quo by presenting sensory critiques of hand prostheses and questioning the demand for them to enable users to “pass” as “normal”.

The BSLs promotes interdisciplinary research into the relationships of science and literature in all periods.

Tuesday 27 February  
2018 (Week 7)

**Dr Jana Funke, University of Exeter**

‘Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion’: Transgender Subjectivities in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century

Literature and Science  
5.30-7.00, Seminar Room  
3, St. Anne's College,  
Oxford

Much scholarship on the history of sexual science

in relation to trans history has tended to focus on two related areas of sexual activity: the invention of diagnostic categories to produce fixed and stable identities, and the development of surgical and hormonal technologies to alter the physical appearance of trans bodies over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, sexual science is mainly remembered for implementing a medicalized framework that produced rigid diagnostic labels and put emphasis on the physical or somatic aspects of trans experience. This paper presents an alternative account of the relation between trans history and sexual science by focusing on a slightly earlier historical period, the decades between 1880 and 1920. At a time when surgical and hormonal interventions were not yet within immediate medical reach, understandings of what is nowadays described as trans identity emerged through sustained dialogue between scientific and literary writers who shared ideas concerning the role of *Einfühlung* (empathy), fantasy, dreams, the imagination and creativity in enabling an individual to experience and achieve cross-gender identification. Starting with British sexologist Havelock Ellis's concept of ‘sexo-aesthetic inversion’ and Ellis's exchange with modernist writer Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman) in the late 1910s, the paper works backwards to trace the intellectual roots of the scientific-literary framing of trans subjectivities. These include late nineteenth-century scientific studies of colour hearing, sense perception and aesthetics as well as works by literary authors like Olive Schreiner, Vernon Lee and William Sharp/Fiona Macleod to name but a few. Through its investigation of this earlier moment, the paper moves across the Victorian-Modernist divide to illuminate previously overlooked forms of exchange between literary and sexual scientific writings and to offer an alternative account of modern trans history.



Drinks will be served after each seminar.

All welcome, no booking required.

More information can be found here: <https://diseasesofmodernlife.org/category/events/>

# BSLS ANNUAL CONFERENCE OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY 5–7 APRIL 2018

The thirteenth annual conference of the British Society of Literature & Science will take place at Oxford Brookes University, from Thursday 5 April until Saturday 7 April.

Keynote talks will be given by Professor Kirsten Shepherd-Barr (University of Oxford) and Professor Alex Goody (Oxford Brookes University).

Please note that those attending the conference will need to make their own arrangements for accommodation. Information on local hotels will be made available soon.

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

## UPCOMING CONFERENCE PANELS

On 9 April Emily Alder takes part in an interdisciplinary panel on the subject of *Frankenstein* and science as part of the Edinburgh International Science Festival: <https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/> The programme launches on 7 February and the event is titled Let's Talk Frankly. It would be great to see you there!

At the inaugural British Association of Literary Studies (BACLS) 'What Happens Now' Conference in July held at Loughborough University, Andrew Rowcroft will be outlining his proposal for a single author study of the American science-fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson in dialogue with Marxist critical concerns in class, ecology, and utopia.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

If you can't get enough of *Frankenstein* in 2018, you might consider submitting a proposal to the Fates of Frankenstein conference in Edinburgh in November. Literature and science proposals are warmly encouraged – for queries, you can write directly to me at [em.alder@napier.ac.uk](mailto:em.alder@napier.ac.uk) or use the conference email, [frankensteinat200@gmail.com](mailto:frankensteinat200@gmail.com). CFP deadline is 30 April: <http://blogs.napier.ac.uk/the-age-of-frankenstein/fates-frankenstein-call-papers/>

*Emily Alder*

### RECENT PH.D.

Travis Lau recently defended in December 2017 his dissertation *Prophylactic Fictions: Immunity and Biosecurity*, a project which traces the British literary and cultural history of immunity and vaccination alongside discourses of national security and the rise of the security state.