



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

*Prof. Jenni Halpin (Savannah State University), Chair; Dr Laura E. Ludtke (Independent Scholar), Secretary;  
Dr Ros Powell (University of Bristol), Treasurer; Dr Jordan Kistler (University of Strathclyde), Communications Officer;  
Dr Emily Alder (Edinburgh Napier University), Membership Secretary;  
Dr Franziska Kohlt (University of York), Book Reviews Editor.  
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).*

## RECENT EVENTS

### ENGLISH: SHARED FUTURES 2

BSLS took a roundtable to the English: Shared Futures 2 conference in Manchester in July, postponed from 2020. Chaired by Greg Lynall, 'Turning English into STEAM' showcased engagement projects from Laura Ludtke, Gemma Curto, Fran Kohlt, and Martin Willis, and gave them opportunity to reflect upon interdisciplinarity, audience, and the place of the humanities (including the absence of an 'H' from the STEAM acronym!). The panel agreed that making our methodologies visible seemed to be the most fruitful and exciting aspect of engagement work, and panelists also thought through the challenges in establishing dialogue between historical research and contemporary scientific practice. The Shared Futures conference was again a valuable opportunity to highlight the work of BSLS to our colleagues within the wider discipline.

—Greg Lynall

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

Summer 2022 Newsletter

### CoSciLit CONFERENCE

After a two-year delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission on Science and Literature (CoSciLit) held its 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Science & Literature from 30<sup>th</sup> June to 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2022. Hosted by the *Càtedra de Ciències i Humanitats Dr. Bofill* at the University of Girona, with papers in Catalan, Spanish and English, the conference brought together speakers from across Europe and the United States, including several who joined remotely for hybrid panels. The conference opened with a compelling plenary by Juan Francisco Campo from Girona drawing out chilling comparisons between the iconography of the plague in the work of painters such as Breughel and the visual record of the Nazi concentration camps, linked via Albert Camus's novel *La Peste*. Many of the themes of Dr Campo's talk were picked up by other speakers across the three days of the conference. Pandemic diseases resurfaced in Konstantinos Konstantopoulos's paper on the Greek poet and doctor Miltiades Emmanuel's satirical response to the dengue fever epidemic in Smyrna in 1889. The holocaust inevitably formed the backdrop for Kostas Tampakis's case for literature and science studies to pay more heed to Primo Levi, particularly in engaging wider publics. Abuses of power and campaigns of extermination formed the subjects of two more plenary lectures. CoSciLit President George Vlahakis drew attention to parallels between the careers of scientists working under the authoritarian regimes in Spain and Greece which persisted long after the end of World War II. Jordi Canal from the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in Paris took us back to the horrific massacre of a traditionalist religious

minority by a self-proclaimed progressive state in Canudos in Brazil in the 1890s, recorded in Euclides Da Cunha's journalistic masterpiece *Os Sertões* and revisited in Mario Vargass Llosa's novel *The War at the End of the World*.



As at previous CoSciLit conferences, a wide range of literature from different periods and in different languages was examined from many different perspectives informed by science and its history. Michael Whitworth and Wolfgang Funk joined us remotely from Oxford and Mainz, respectively, for a panel on experiments with form in scientific epics in English by Mathilde Blind, Mina Loy, and Ronald Duncan. Modern poetry in other languages also featured strongly in the programme, including Benito García-Valero's examination of blending mental spaces in Chilean poet Raúl Zurita's responses to the trauma of Pinochet's dictatorship, Lorenzo Piera Martín's paper on cognition in Dominique Sampiero's French poetry, and Friederike Foedtké's exploration of empathy in the work of Spanish poet Olvido García Valdés. Isabel Portillo and Julien Simon picked up the theme of empathy in a fascinating panel informed by current cognitive theories on responses to violence in early modern Spanish literature. Isabel also contributed a second paper on empathy in cinematic responses to fascism alongside Benito's paper and a discussion of embodied reading by Pierre-Louis Patoine, together making up a further panel on cognitive approaches to literature which emerged as another distinctive thread across the conference as a whole. Another panel fortuitously juxtaposed Michael Wainwright's reading



John Holmes (left) and Kostas Tampakis (right) present fellow CoSciLit executive committee member George Vlahakis (founding President of CoSciLit) with a book of Byron's poems in honour of all the work he has done leading the commission for the past nine years.

of William Faulkner's *Pylon* in relation to John Bowlby's attachment theory with Timothy Ryan Day's suggestive thoughts towards a biosemiotic reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets, translated into DNA and haunting Victor Hugo's seances. The haunting continued in Maria Vara's paper on the influence of magic lantern technology on Gothic fiction, which was followed by Maria generously reading a paper by her colleague Sophia Denissi from Athens School of Fine Arts (who was sadly unable to join us because of a last minute positive Covid test) on an appropriation of the forensic detective Sherlock Holmes in an early Greek crime (and fan) novel. Early modern philosophy featured in Filip Buyse's analysis of the interchange of ideas between Boyle and Spinoza through their correspondence with the intermediary Henry Oldenburg as well as in the fourth plenary, by Jorge García López from the University of Girona, on the Spanish enlightenment philosopher Martin Martinez.



Alongside literary critics and historians of science, we heard from several scientists themselves, including engineer and CoSciLit regular Constantin Canavas, who discussed the epistemological implications of the transformation of a woman into a plant in Korean novelist Han Kang's story 'The Fruit of My Woman', scientist Núria Ruiz showed how to popularise science through literature, and chemist Miquel Duran, who presented a paper co-written with mathematician Fernando Blasco on E. A. Abbott's *Flatland* as a device for thinking and teaching about two-dimensional chemistry. A panel on digital humanities foregrounded work from several Spanish universities, including research on Wikipedia by the conference organiser literary scholar Carlos Gámez Pérez and his collaborator, materials scientist Gustavo Ariel Schwartz.

A selection of papers from the conference will be published as a special issue of *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*. At the end of the conference, we returned to visual art with a screening of a film of the making of *The Dance of Icarus* by the contemporary painter José Benítez. The conference closed with a uniquely touching and memorable moment when Prof. Humbert Massegur, the Honorary Director of the *Càtedra Dr. Bofill*, presented canvases donated by the artist himself to five speakers whose contributions to

the conference had been especially thought-provoking and collegial. Throughout the conference we were treated to incomparable hospitality by the organisers and enjoyed the architectural beauty and relaxed but lively atmosphere of Girona itself. CoSciLit would like to thank Carlos, Juan, Humbert and their colleagues for organising such a thought-provoking and enjoyable

conference and for welcoming us so generously to their beautiful city. The next conference of CoSciLit is in planning to be held jointly with the BSLS at the University of Birmingham in April 2024.

—John Holmes  
Secretary, Commission on Science and Literature

## UPCOMING EVENT: BSLS WINTER SYMPOSIUM

The 2022 BSLS Winter Symposium will be *The Subterranean Anthropocene: Excavation, Extracting, Uncovering from Classical to Contemporary Literature*, on 12 November. The symposium will be an online, with full access to panels and plenaries provided for remote attendees. CFP and additional details will be forthcoming.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Daniel Cordle. 'Exploring the End of the World with Nuclear Literature and Daniel Cordle'. Shelly Leshner, host. *My Nuclear Life*, 31 May 2022. <https://mynuclearlife.com/episode/exploring-the-end-of-the-world-with-nuclear-literature-and-daniel-cordle>

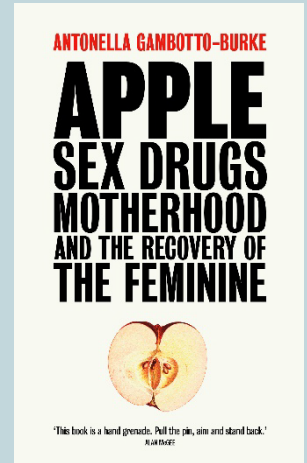
Daniel Cordle was recently interviewed by Shelly Leshner for the May episode of the *My Nuclear Life* podcast, '[Exploring the End of the World with Nuclear Literature and Daniel Cordle](#)' (also available via the usual podcast apps). Their conversation covered topics including the social and psychological impact of nuclear fear, the breadth and depth of nuclear literature, and the ways in which nuclear literature explores the idea of end times. They also discuss shifts in nuclear consciousness precipitated by the war in Ukraine, a topic Daniel also investigated in an expert blog for the Nottingham Trent University website: '[Long After Midnight: On Our New Nuclear Fears](#)' (Feb/Mar 2022).

Daniel Davison-Vecchione and Sean Seeger. 'Ursula Le Guin's Speculative Anthropology: Thick Description, Historicity and Science Fiction.' *Theory, Culture & Society*, Nov. 2021, doi: [10.1177/02632764211051780](https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764211051780).

This article argues that Ursula Le Guin's science fiction is a form of 'speculative anthropology' that reconciles thick description and historicity. Like Clifford Geertz's ethnographic writings, Le Guin's science fiction utilises thick description to place the reader within unfamiliar social worlds rendered with extraordinary phenomenological fluency. At the same time, by incorporating social antagonisms, cultural contestation, and historical contingency, Le Guin never allows thick description to neutralise historicity. Rather, by combining the two and exploring their interplay, Le Guin establishes a critical relation between her imagined worlds and the reader's own historical moment. This enables her to both counter Fredric Jameson's influential criticism of her work – the charge of 'world reduction' – and point to ungrasped utopian possibilities within the present. Le Guin's speculative anthropology thus combines the strengths while overcoming some of the limitations of both Geertz's thick-descriptive method and Jameson's theory of the science fiction genre.

Antonella Gambotto-Burke. *Apple: Sex, Drugs, Motherhood and the Recovery of the Feminine*. Pinter & Martin, 2022.

*Apple* has just been featured on the cover of *The Weekend Australian* and in the *Mensa International Journal*, among other publications. *Apple* addresses the far-reaching impact of modern obstetric practices on both the individual and cultural levels, and reframes obstetric practice as the primary tool of the prevailing ideology. Within this context, Gambotto-Burke presents a new understanding of art and sex, concluding with a blueprint for the restoration of humanity.



Alessia Pannese. 'Epistemic Perspectives on Enthusiasm in Late Seventeenth-Century England'. *Harvard Theological Review*, 115.2 (April 2022): pp. 243-273. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/>

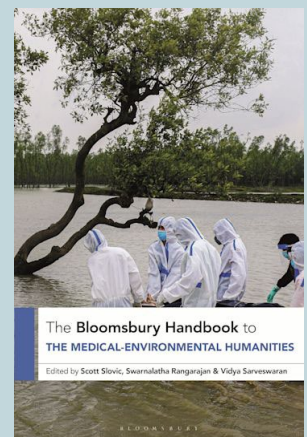
This study examines the late seventeenth-century reception of enthusiasm in England in the context of the contemporary epistemological debate. Challenging characterizations of responses to enthusiasm as partitioned along the rationalist-empiricist divide, I show how parallel critiques of enthusiasm by natural philosophers and theologians suggest shared epistemic commitments across methodological and disciplinary boundaries, reflecting evolving concerns in the broader epistemological debate, rather than fixed, domain- or ideology-specific positions. By challenging a crude rationalist-empiricist division, this study aligns itself with previous literature, while also departing from it, in that it locates in the critique of enthusiasm a previously under-examined facet of that debate. By showing that both natural philosophers and theologians rejected enthusiasm for its irrationality, this work also sharpens the current understanding of the epistemic significance of enthusiasm, in that it identifies the crux of the critique of enthusiasm in its lack of reason, and not of an empirical foundation.

Sofia Varino. 'Pathogenic (Auto)Ecologies: Environmental Illness Mechanisms.' *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Medical-Environmental Humanities*, Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, editors. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

Bringing together two parallel and occasionally intersecting disciplines—the environmental and medical humanities—this field-defining handbook reveals our ecological predicament to be a simultaneous threat to human health. The book:

- Represents the first collection to bring the environmental humanities and medical humanities into conversation in a systematic way
- Features contributions from a wide range of interdisciplinary perspectives including literary studies, environmental ethics and philosophy, cultural history and sociology
- Adopts a truly global approach, examining contexts including, but not limited to, North America, the UK, Africa, Latin America, South Asia, Turkey and East Asia
- Touches on issues and approaches such as narrative medicine, ecoprecarity, toxicity, mental health, and contaminated environments.

Showcasing and surveying a rich spectrum of issues and methodologies, this book looks not only at where research currently is at the intersection of these two important fields, but also at where it is going.



Michael Wainwright. 'Vermicular Dreams: The Strange Case of Dr. Stevenson and Mr. Nabokov.' *Arkansas Philological Review* 47.1 (Summer 2022): pp. 61–109.

Robert Louis Stevenson's (1850–94) *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) comprises the fourth subject in *Vladimir Nabokov: Lectures on Literature* (1980), with Nabokov (1899–1977) suggesting an appellative derivation for the main character(s) in the Danish words *hide* (haven) and *Jökulle* (icicle). The name Hyde intrigues Nabokov enough, however, to suggest a second possibility: *hydatid*, Greek for 'water', especially the water in which tapeworms grow within a body. Thus, suggests Nabokov, 'Mr. Hyde is Dr. Jekyll's parasite.' Nabokov immediately withdraws this suggestion, however. The present paper reveals why critics should discount this withdrawal. For, during the summer of 1884, while living in Hyères, France, as Margaret Mackay documents, Stevenson's wife Fanny was reading *The Lancet* and using it to inform their diets. With cholera threatening to engulf Hyères in the late summer of 1884, the Stevensons decamped to Bournemouth, England, and here Robert Stevenson would reveal the strands of his parasitic legacy from Hyères, a legacy that at once prompted his self-analysis and underwrote his most famous novella: 'I have been detected in the felonious possession of many yards of tapeworm,' he wrote to Charles Baxter on 4 October 1884.



## DEGREE CONFERRED

Patrick Armstrong

### Microscopy and Modernist Fiction from Hardy to Beckett

This thesis explores how four writers—D. H. Lawrence, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Samuel Beckett—registered shock experiences of the microscopic in prose fiction. Focusing on microscopes and the unfamiliar microworlds they reveal, I illustrate ways in which optical instruments had the capacity to change, displace and reframe ideas of what the world is like. Exploring a period of significant developments in microscopical tools and techniques, from the light microscope to the electron microscope, this thesis traces a paradigm shift that reconfigured the limits of the observable. It proposes that writers employed the microscope as a self-referential metaphor, drawing attention to the intricate imaginative work a novel can perform. By absorbing and redistributing the disorientating perspectives generated by microscopes, modernist fiction can be read afresh as an analogous optical instrument that reconfigures the boundaries of visibility. (Defended in April at the University of Cambridge)



## 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*

# CALLS

## VICTORIAN REPRODUCTIONS WORKSHOP, 24-25 MARCH 2023 (JOHANNES GUTENBERG- UNIVERSITÄT MAINZ)

**Deadline for proposals: 15 September 2022**

Following the surge of medico-scientific tracts on human anatomy and sexuality (*Gray's Anatomy*; Geddes and Thomson's *Evolution of Sex*; William Acton's *Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*; William Buchan's *Advice to Mothers*) and in the wake of Darwin's evolutionary theories in *The Origin of the Species*, reproduction became a topic widely discussed in Victorian literature and culture. As science began to open up the human body for the public gaze, gestation and childbirth became increasingly alienated from the mother and maternal agency (Doyle 16). Evolutionary principles of arbitrariness and natural selection worked to consolidate a hierarchy of the sexes which tended to reduce woman to her childbearing role (Spencer 30-33, Levine 170-73, Poovey 6, 35). At the same time, the reproductive body sparked awe and anxiety. Mutable and porous, it not only announced its own sexuality, but it also potentially posed a threat to the wholesome and stable middle-class body (Malone 376; Matus 47-58).

In the field of literature, reproduction held an equal fascination. Victorian literature, and poetry especially, as John Holmes notes, can serve as 'a documentary source for understanding the significance of evolution within Victorian culture' (60). At least since the Renaissance, childbirth has been used metaphorically time and again to express artistic creativity and intellectual production (Friedmann 49). It is also widely deployed by both male and female Victorian writers, for whom it provides 'a metaphor deeply vexed, internally incoherent, occasionally essentialist, and potentially empowering' (Weber 276). For many women writers, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the literary child offered a way to symbolise and critically reflect conventional role ascriptions in the process of creating life as well as letters (Taylor 158). Especially the *fin-de-siècle* spawned many works which renegotiated reproduction in both its biological scientific and artistic sense. Mathilde Blind's *The Ascent of Man*, for instance, revises Darwinian evolutionary thought, stressing a distinctly female origin of the species, and of rhythm and metricality (Rudy 443-449). Productions and reproductions in and of texts, of

metre and form thus merge with cultural reflections about procreation, configurations of bodies and gender, as well as the development of the human species in general.

This workshop aims to uncover some of the complex textual and cultural relations and representations of reproduction. We especially invite papers on Victorian poetry and poetic forms and their manifold interactions with the topic, but likewise welcome contributions addressing narration, drama, non-literary texts and interdisciplinary approaches. Papers targeting the long nineteenth century more generally are also welcome, as are papers on Neo-Victorian texts.

Potential topics can include, but are not limited to:

- Darwinism, Lamarckianism, biology, genetics, scientific ideas of reproduction
- Cultural (re)figurations of evolution and reproduction
- Anatomy and anatomical depictions of reproduction and reproductive organs
- Ecology and reproduction of organisms and plants
- Socio-political interpretations of evolution and motherhood, Bodies and body politics, eugenics
- Birth, gestation, labour, the womb
- Maternity, the female/maternal body
- Midwifery, obstetrics, motherhood advisory literature
- Male practitioners, the male gaze in reproduction, practices of anaesthesia
- Victorian sexual morals, practices of concealing and revealing reproduction and reproducing bodies
- Embodiment and the reproduction of sensations
- Reproduction of art, intellectual appropriation of reproduction, the text as brain-child
- Periodicity and cyclicity
- Formal, rhythmic, metrical organisations of (poetic) texts
- Neo-Victorian reproductions

Proposals for papers (250-300 words), together with a short biographical note (50-100 words) are to be sent via email to Wolfgang Funk ([wfunk@uni-mainz.de](mailto:wfunk@uni-mainz.de)) and Sarah Wegener ([sawegene@uni-mainz.de](mailto:sawegene@uni-mainz.de)) by 15 September 2022. Please include your name, your institutional affiliation and email address.

For any further questions, please contact the organisers of the workshop.

# SF AND SOCIETAL VULNERABILITY: FRAGILITY, COLLAPSE, AND TRANSFORMATION

**Deadline for proposals: 15 September 2022**

COVID showed us what we already knew, how fragile global capitalist societies are and how unresilient they become when the structures get shocked. Some of those structures deserve to be destroyed (authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, colonialism, labor exploitation, e.g.); others need to be shored up or replaced with even better institutions and practices (healthcare, the planetary ecosystem, wealth equity, social justice, e.g.). When these fragile structures fail, their failures disproportionately affect those least able to bear the harm. And, around the world, the harmful effects of exploitative structures are repeatedly discriminatorily directed.

The mass media, as well as scholars and activists from varied disciplines and fields, are already critiquing the “post-COVID” “return to normal” for its failure to emerge from the early years of the pandemic into a world that deliberately and substantially functions differently and better. The future in which we live is going to be made from the present. In all its forms, speculative fiction has long imagined—more and less plausibly—where we go from here. It isn’t the only literature that does so (so-called realist fiction may focus more on the “here,” but it’s also interested in what’s next). How does fiction depict and engage with societal fragility/lack of resiliency? How does literature

imagine alternative, adaptable, and more durable social formations and institutions?

We seek literary critical engagements with alternatives and responses to authoritarian/nationalistic/militaristic political structures arising during the Anthropocene as well as speculative alternatives to the necessary social institutions that are more just, effective, and sustainable. COVID reminds us of what has always been true: our social structures are imperfect; literature, throughout history, has been imagining alternatives. Our hope is to assemble a collection of demonstrations and interventions that explicitly engage readers in calls to action.

Possible topics could include but are not limited to:

- Ecocriticism
- Ecopunk and solar punk
- Climate justice
- Extraction studies
- Futurism
- Animal studies
- Posthumanism (and all the other prefixes)
- Utopian studies
- Race and ethnic studies
- Decolonization
- Queer/Queering ecologies

Please send abstracts of up to 500 words in length, along with a brief bio of up to 200 words, to [jonelmore.english@gmail.com](mailto:jonelmore.english@gmail.com) and [jennihalpin@gmail.com](mailto:jennihalpin@gmail.com) no later than 15 September 2022, with full chapters to be submitted by 15 March 2023. Queries always welcome.

## EARLY CAREER ESSAY PRIZE 2022

Reminder: the deadline for submissions for the *JLS*/BSLS essay prize for 2022 is 5pm (BST) on Friday, 30 September, 2022. Essays, by early career scholars, on any topic within the field of literature and science, 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](mailto:Jordan.kistler@strath.ac.uk)), and Martin Willis, Editor of the *JLS* ([willism8@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:willism8@cardiff.ac.uk)).

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/>).

