



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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Dr Louise Benson James (University of Ghent).  
Overseas Representative, Europe: Dr Liliane Campos (Sorbonne Nouvelle University).*

## **EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL BSLS CONFERENCE 13-15 APRIL 2023 EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY**

The eighteenth annual conference of the British Society for Literature and Science was held at Edinburgh Napier's Craiglockhart campus, a site that, as the Campus's War Poets exhibition tells us, was once a hydropathic establishment and then a military hospital during the First World War. Here, *The Hydra* journal was published, which was intended to be 'many headed – many sided' like the creature of Greek mythology, and thus it recorded the daily life of the hospital through the contributions of both staff and patients. The site's shifting and many-sided associations were similarly reflected in the diverse and engaging topics covered by the plenaries, panels, and workshops throughout the duration of the conference. Delegates covered topics ranging from mythology to ecology, mermaids to dinosaurs, Darwinian evolution to the Anthropocene, suitably illustrating the importance of embracing multiplicity. The papers given

further represented a range of voices, narratives, and forms of knowledge, encompassing the mathematical, biological, and empirical, but also philosophy, imagination, and sensibility. Evidently, the field of literature and science is as multi-faceted as the Hydra.

The conference opened with a roundtable plenary given by Scott Lyall, Alice Jenkins, and Christina Alt, who explored 'Literature, Science and Scotland' through the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid, the historical alignment between philosophy and geometry within Scottish education, and Nan Shepherd's ecology. John Holmes's plenary later had us rethinking the 'porous boundary of humanity' through a surprising and skilful combination of Linnaeus, Ezra Pound and J. R. R. Tolkien, while Laurence Talairach brought the second day to a thought-provoking close by highlighting the overlooked scientific contributions of women, such as Jemima Blackburn, within children's literature. A personal highlight of the conference was the 'Interdisciplinary Studies' panel where Josie Gill, Tom Hey, and Graham Matthews demonstrated the importance of interdisciplinarity, the benefits of highlighting moments of disciplinary disjunction, and the necessity of *undisciplinarity*.

Throughout the conference, the panels and plenaries recurrently examined literature and science as both disparate and integrated disciplines that pursue a holistic expression or definition of the 'human experience'. Rather than a unifying conclusion, the

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

**Spring 2023 Newsletter**

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.

range of papers given at the conference exemplified that it is only through multiplicity that we can begin to reconcile the external world with internal experience, the ideal with the actual, the abstract with the tangible, the bodied and the disembodied. As Alice Jenkins reminded us, in terms of understanding what it is to be 'human', the field of literature and science attempts to articulate the undertaking rather than the success.

As a first-time attendee at the BSLS Conference, I found a welcoming community fostered by the careful organisation of the event. The PGR/ECR publishing workshop, delivered by the *JLS* team, was a particularly valuable and thoughtful addition to the programme, and the conference dinner at Summerhall—an old veterinary school complete with anatomy theatre—was another personal highlight. I'm sure for many of us, the warm and inviting atmosphere over dinner was topped off by the quiz and limerick competition!

—Beth Brigham  
Northumbria University

April brought the eighteenth conference of the British Society for Literature and Science! On Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> April we gathered on a sunny Edinburgh morning to kickstart our three days of intense and extensive programme on everything literary and scientific. Organized by Emily Alder, the conference lasted three days, comprising an incredible range of papers—divided into many panels, brilliant plenaries, and afternoon and evening activities. We welcomed speakers from a huge variety of different countries, at all stages of their academic careers and from a range of disciplines.

At the end of the conference, we shared the feeling that new critical approaches to nineteenth-century feeling had been constructed under our eyes. Multiple delegates praised the conference's comfortable environment, which encouraged positive engagement and fostered beautiful moments of discussion.

As an Edinburgh student I might be biased, but Napier University seemed the perfect place to host the events. The architecture itself looked like it was just out of a science fiction novel, inspiring thrilling conversations on the reciprocal relation of literature and science!

On Friday evening we gathered at Summerhall for a sumptuous conference dinner and waited eagerly for the announcement of the winner of the prize for best book of the year. Congratulations to Emily Taylor-Pirie for a well-deserved award for her fascinating *Empire Under the Microscope*. And a well done to all the shortlisted authors!

I want to conclude by thanking Emily Alder, who has been an amazing and welcoming organizer, and the BSLS committee, for their engaging, interesting, and informative AGM. A personal thank you also for having given me the opportunity to participate in the conference, which I will always remember fondly. Finally, a very well done to all the speakers for the brilliant job they did in providing exciting new critical perspectives in the field.

—Claudia Sterbini  
University of Edinburgh

## FUTURE BSLS CONFERENCES

BSLS 19, BIRMINGHAM, 10-12\* APRIL 2024, JOINTLY WITH CoSciLit

BSLS 20, LANCASTER, 10-12 APRIL 2025

BSLS 21, STRATHCLYDE, 2026

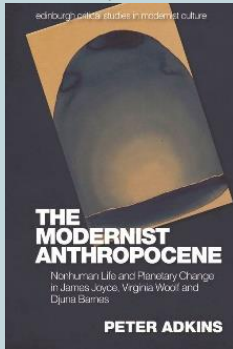
The Society invites conversations with members interested in hosting upcoming annual conferences. Please contact the chair, Jenni Halpin ([jennihalpin@gmail.com](mailto:jennihalpin@gmail.com)).

\*Plans are emerging for a somewhat larger conference for 2024, which may extend beyond three days.

*bsls.ac.uk*

# BSLS 2022 BOOK PRIZE

From among a strong field of publications in literature and science across 2022, the shortlist committee—Chisomo Kalinga, John Holmes, Jordan Kistler, and chair Laura Ludtke—had the task of choosing the prize winner. They had this to say of the shortlisted works (listed here alphabetically):

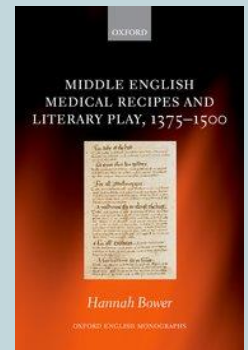


Peter Adkins, *The Modernist Anthropocene: Nonhuman Life and Planetary Change in James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes* (Edinburgh UP).

A well-positioned and ambitious study that brings modernist texts into conversation with the Anthropocene and invites re-reading of key moments such as Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses*, beastliness in Djuna Barnes, and weather watching in Woolf.

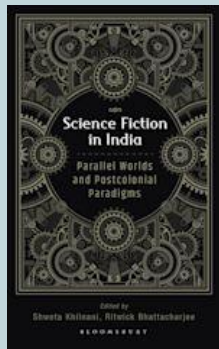
Hannah Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500* (Oxford UP).

A focussed and scrupulous study of medieval medical recipes, drawing out their rhetoric, textual bibliography, and capacity for 'literary play'. It invites readers to engage with a surprising and refreshing body of work.



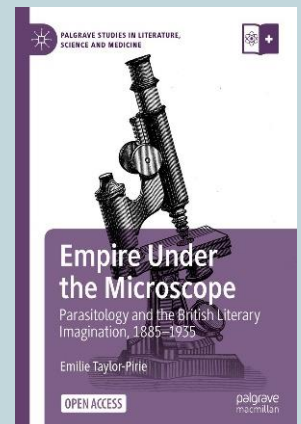
Shweta Khilnani and Ritwick Bhattacharjee (eds), *Science Fiction in India: Parallel Worlds and Postcolonial Paradigms* (Bloomsbury Academic)

An important intervention that offers a new critical paradigm for postcoloniality in relation to science fiction and forcefully challenges received politics of the discipline. Editors' introductions to each chapter are a novel approach generating coherence and cogency across the collection.



Of the prizewinning book, the committee offers this praise:  
Emilie Taylor-Pirie, *Empire Under the Microscope: Parasitology and the British Literary Imagination, 1885-1935* (Palgrave Macmillan)

A landmark study that speaks directly to immediate concerns such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the persistence of empire and which will advance the important conversations around literature, science, and colonial legacies. This work clearly maps an impressive range of medical, biographical, and literary materials across the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The judging panel would like to commend the combination of historical, geographical, and generic breadth with remarkably close attention to textual detail.



*Empire Under the Microscope* is an OPEN ACCESS text.

## BSLS REVIEWS

Hard on the heels of the annual conference, Sharon Ruston has taken up the role of Reviews Editor. While she anticipates taking a little time to get up to speed, she is already happy to receive communications at the reviews e-mail: [BSLSreviews@gmail.com](mailto:BSLSreviews@gmail.com)

*bsls.ac.uk*

# CALL FOR REVIEWERS

The *Journal of Literature and Science* is once again looking for reviewers to review various articles published in the last year to 18 months in the field of literature and science.

Please find below a number of articles that we would like to offer for review. It's largely first come, first served, so do get in touch with an offer to review a specific article by emailing Michelle at [m.geric@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:m.geric@westminster.ac.uk)

I would also be very happy to receive suggestions for other relevant articles for review that aren't listed below – please do let me know.

Reviews should be 750 words long. For more details, please follow the link: <http://www.literatureandscience.org> or contact me to register your interest.

—Michelle Geric

*Journal of Literature and Science*

## SUGGESTED ARTICLES:

From *European Romantic Review*:

- Andrew Burkett, “Deep Time: Queen Mab.”

From *Nineteenth-Century Literature*:

- Stephanie Kinzinger, “Embodied Cognition in Edgar Allan Poe: Eureka’s Cosmology, Dupin’s Intuition.”
- Christiane Schwab, “Sailors, Book Hawkers, and Bricklayer’s Laborers: Social Types and the Production of Social Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Periodical Literature.”
- Jayne Hildebrand, “Environmental Desire in *The Mill on the Floss*.”

From *Victorian Literature and Culture*:

- Christopher Harrington, “Cut it, woman”: Masculinity, Nectar, and the Orgasm in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849).”
- Natasha Reby Coulthard, “Becoming What You Eat: Anna Kingsford’s Vegetarian Posthuman.”
- Rebecca Spence, “A Sigh of Sympathy”: Thomas Hardy’s Paralinguistic Aesthetics and Evolutionary Sympathy.”
- Cara Murray, “Cultivating Chaos: Entropy, Information, and the Making of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.”

From *Victoriographies*:

- Barbara Barrow, “‘Shattering’ and ‘Violent’ Forces: Gender, Ecology, and Catastrophe in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*.”
- Melissa Prudue, “‘Embowered in a mass of vegetation’: Confinement and Predatory Plants in Fin-de-Siècle Fiction.”

From *Configurations*:

- Jordan Kistler, “I Cannot Tell You All the Story: Narrative, Historical Knowledge, and the Museum in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*.”

- Grace Anne Paizen, “The Digitized Museum and the Troubling Reliance on Technology to Manage Knowledge in E. M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops*.”
- Lauren A. Mitchell, “Erotic Surgery: J. G. Ballard’s *Crash*, Octavia Butler’s ‘Bloodchild,’ and the Visual Legacy of the Medical Museum.”
- Verity Burke and Will Tattersdill, “Science Fiction Worldbuilding in Museum Displays of Extinct Life.”
- Diana Leong, “A Hundred Tiny Hands: Slavery, Nanotechnology, and the Anthropocene in *Midnight Robber*.”
- Leah Henrickson and Albert Meroño-Peñuela, “The Hermeneutics of Computer-Generated Texts.”
- Hannes Bajohr, “Algorithmic Empathy: Toward a Critique of Aesthetic AI.”
- Marco Caracciolo and Gry Ulstein, “The Weird and the Meta in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Dead Astronauts*.”
- Emily York, “Interspecies Ethics and the Limits of Epistemic Authority in Karen Joy Fowler’s *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*.”
- Victor Monnin, “Reading Omens in the Escape of Genetically Engineered Dinosaurs, 1970s–1990s.”

From *ELH*:

- Diana Rose Newby, “Race, Vitalism, and the Contingency of Contagion in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*.”

From *Journal of Modern Literature*:

- Aaron McCullough, “Sheaths, Molds, and Shards: The Formation of an Anthropological Aesthetics in Willa Cather’s *The Song of the Lark*.”
- Karen Ya-Chu Yang, “Female Biologists and the Practice of Dialogical Connectivity in Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*.”

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## “MICROSCOPIC IMAGINARIES IN 20<sup>TH</sup>- AND 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY LITERATURE”

### PARIS, 24 NOVEMBER 2023

When Ronald Ross discovered the protozoan responsible for malaria in 1897, he wrote a poem addressing “million-murdering Death” whose “cunning seeds” he had found. Ross’s poem remains famous, but how has his hope that art and science would walk “hand in hand” fared in the following centuries? Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, microscopy was revolutionised by UV, phase contrast, and electron technology. The circulation of microscopic images increased exponentially with the arrival of television, internet, and digital photography. While visualisations of atomic physics were influential for modernist writers, genetic engineering and microbial agency have become key ingredients of 21<sup>st</sup>-century crime fiction and science fiction, as well as inspirations for ecopoetry, molecular poetics, and experiments in living poetry. This symposium aims to identify the microscopic imaginaries that appeared over this period, and the turning points that structured literature’s engagement with microscopy. We welcome proposals for 20-minute papers in English, on any written literary genre, particularly around the following topics:

- the epistemic dimensions of literary form
- the aesthetics of scale
- the role of literature in changing scopic regimes
- ethical and political dimensions of microscopic imaginaries
- conceptual shifts provoked by microscopic perspectives, around notions such as community, agency, subject, or environment
- relations between microscopic imaginaries and movements such as modernism, naturalism, or new materialism
- authorial postures and reader expectations created by microscopic perspectives
- relations between scientific imagination, popular science imagination, and literary imagination
- how scientific and literary discourses have shaped each other over this period

Proposals should be sent in Word or PDF documents **by 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023** to the organisers:

[liliane.campos@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr](mailto:liliane.campos@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr), [caroline.pollentier@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr](mailto:caroline.pollentier@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr), [sarah.montin@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr](mailto:sarah.montin@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr), and [sarah.bouttier@polytechnique.edu](mailto:sarah.bouttier@polytechnique.edu)

Answers will be sent out by 9<sup>th</sup> June. The symposium will be held in person at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Maison de la Recherche, 4 rue des Irlandais, in Paris. A second symposium will be organized in 2024 on microscopic imaginaries in theatre and performance, and a separate call for papers will be issued for that event.

## UPCOMING EVENT

### THE LITERARY TWILIGHT ZONE: NONFICTIONAL FICTION 1820-1920

#### 28 JUNE 2023, MUIRHEAD TOWER, UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

This one-day event is supported by a BSLS small grant and additionally funded by the Leverhulme Trust, bringing together scholars interested in nineteenth-century fiction’s tangled relationships with the creation of knowledge.

We have papers on topics ranging from ancient aliens to feminist utopias, killer plants, Edgar Allan Poe, and Margaret Oliphant, and the keynote will be Dr Tatiana Kontou, speaking on the Cottingley Fairies. Plans exist to continue conversations over dinner, possibly somewhere around New Street.

The free registration link is [here](#), including more full details about the event. Numbers are fairly limited, but there are still plenty of slots free. It would be fantastic to see you there! Please send any questions over to [nonfictionalfiction23@gmail.com](mailto:nonfictionalfiction23@gmail.com).

—Richard Fallon  
University of Birmingham

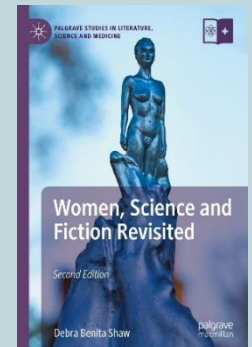
# RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## OF THE PALGRAVE STUDIES

### IN LITERATURE, SCIENCE AND MEDICINE SERIES

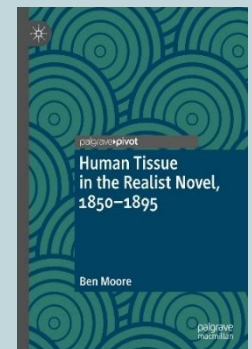
Debra Benita Shaw, *Women, Science and Fiction Revisited* (25 March 2023)

*Women, Science and Fiction Revisited* is an analysis of selected science fiction novels and short stories written by women over the past hundred years from the point of view of their engagement with how science writes the world. Beginning with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1918) and ending with N K Jemisin's *The City We Became* (2020), Debra Benita Shaw explores the re-imagining of gender and race that characterises women's literary crafting of new worlds. Along the way, she introduces new readings of classics like Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, examining the original novels in the context of their adaptation to new media formats in the twenty-first century. What this reveals is a consistent preoccupation with how scientific ideas can be employed to challenge existing social structures and argue for change.



Ben Moore, *Human Tissue in the Realist Novel, 1850-1895* (21 March 2023)

This Pivot engages with current debates about anthropocentrism and the Anthropocene to propose a reappraisal of the realist novel in the second half of the nineteenth century. Through three case studies, it argues for 'human tissue' as a conceptual tool for reading that brings together biology, literature and questions of layering. This new approach is shown to be especially salient to the Victorian period, when the application of 'tissue' to biology first emerges. The book is distinctive in bringing together theoretical concerns around realism and the Anthropocene – two major topics in literary criticism – and presenting a new methodology to approach this conjunction, demonstrated through original readings of Charles Kingsley, George Eliot, and Emile Zola and two English-language writers he influenced (George Moore and Vernon Lee).



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