



# The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

*Dr Barri J. Gold (U of Pennsylvania), Chair; Adele Gnyton (KU Leuven), Secretary;  
Dr Laura E. Ludtke (U of Oxford), Treasurer; Dr Jordan Kistler (U of Strathclyde), Communications Officer;  
Dr Louise Benson James (U of Ghent), Membership Secretary; Prof. Sharon Ruston (Lancaster U), Book Reviews Editor.  
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Olivia Kraunze (U of Cambridge).  
Overseas Representative: Dr Liliane Campos (Sorbonne Nouvelle U).*

## **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THREE SOCIETIES ON LITERATURE AND SCIENCE INCLUDING THE NINETEENTH ANNUAL BSLS CONFERENCE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM, 10-12 APRIL ONLINE 27 APRIL**

In April, the British Society for Literature and Science, the Commission on Science and Literature, and the European Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts came together for their first ever joint conference, which included the BSLS's nineteenth annual meeting. The conference was hosted by the University of Birmingham at their architecturally-diverse Edgbaston campus, centred around the 'Green Heart' – 12-acres of parkland which runs down to the university clocktower, 'Old Joe'. It was appropriate, then, that a rich ecological thread ran through the conference programme, exemplified by the opening plenary on 'Literature, Science and the Arts in Interdisciplinary Research', which featured academics

working on forestry research, sustainability and climate narratives, and the intersections between science and belief.

The day's panels offered delegates an immense range of topics; the nature of human interface with environment was at the forefront of many presentations, whether that be animal, floral, or psychological. We came together again that afternoon for the inaugural Transformative Humanities lecture by Dr Isabel Jaén Portillo: 'Empathy and the Transformative Power of Fiction', a powerful analysis of narrative's ability to incite compassion, with examples from early modern literature through to contemporary Spanish cinema. The day concluded with drinks and the launch of Bloomsbury's new *Explorations in Science and Literature* series. The support of Bloomsbury and Palgrave underscored the exciting opportunities for LitSci publishing, as did the well-deserved awarding of the BSLS book prize to Amelia DeFalco's *Curious Kin* during the conference. No doubt many future book projects will be able to trace back their origins to discussions and chance meetings during this week.

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

Spring 2024 Newsletter

Topics on the second day ranged from the alignments of literature with geology, mathematics, and biology; engagements with the world through soundscapes; and how humans might navigate digital worlds in a post-analogue society. Our plenary sessions saw the AGMs of the organizing societies: a window into the time and dedication that academics have expended in fostering such rich networks and collaborative spaces in literature and science scholarship. This was followed by a fascinating series of presentations by the Science & Fiction Lab at Florida International University. This interdisciplinary collaboration explores the power of fiction to clarify uniquely complex scientific concepts, using 'FiSci analogies': how is a protein like *Orlando Furioso*, or gravity like a government? This naturally provided us with much to discuss at that evening's conference dinner, hosted at Asha's Restaurant in Birmingham.

The third and final day invited delegates into the curated past of the museum, into the uncertain future

of AI, and into the layers of text and para-text in fiction. Professor Brian Hurwitz brought us together for the final plenary, presenting the many faces of the medical anecdote as social practice, a remarkable synthesis of anthropology, medicine, and literature. Closing remarks allowed delegates to share their appreciation for the organizers Jenni Halpin, Aura Heydenreich, and John Holmes for such a successful event, as well as for the technical support from staff and students at Birmingham. Rarely do conferences of this scope provide such a warm and friendly atmosphere, especially for the many PGRs and ECRs featured. I'm sure I am not alone in saying how positive this experience has been, and in looking forward to BSLS 2025 in Lancaster.

*Thomas Banbury*  
*University of Cambridge*

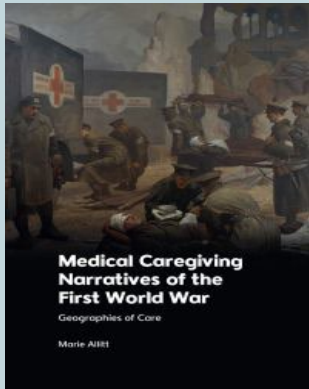


Post-Conference Trip to BIFoR (Birmingham Institute of Forest Research) on 13 April 2024

# BSLS BOOK PRIZE

We received nominations for 29 monographs for the 2023 BSLS Book Prize from a wide range of publishers, including many familiar British university and trade presses. (The two edited collections that were nominated will be considered alongside nominations received in 2024 for the newly established edited collections prize category.)

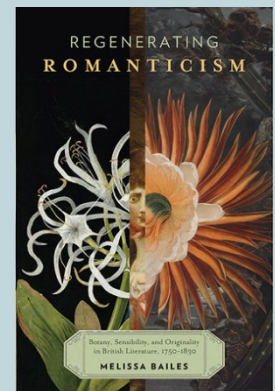
The chair (Laura Ludtke) thanks longlist readers Louise Benson James, Sara Cole, Jenni Halpin, and Sharon Ruston for their help in assessing a field of nominated titles that was exceptionally strong this year. The judging committee, comprising Barri J. Gold, Jordan Kistler, Jenni Halpin, and Laura Ludtke (chair), commends all four shortlisted titles for their achievements and their respective contributions to the field.



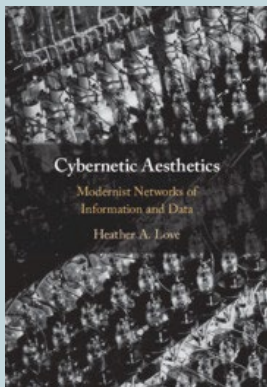
Marie Allitt, *Medical Caregiving Narratives of the First World War: Geographies of Care* (Edinburgh University Press): This book's importance is not least because it makes a case for thinking about 'geographies of care'. Allitt is doing several new and urgent things for the field of critical medical humanities here, offering us new insights into the doctor-patient relationship, narrative medicine, and recovering lost voices of first world war care workers. Significantly, Allitt dispels the reductive image of the medic as authoritarian and absolute and explores vicarious trauma experienced by carers.

re-inscribing the importance of women writers in a scientific literature that was appropriated by the now-canonical 'big six' male writers of the Romantic period. Bailes proposes a new way of looking at the interactions between literature and science that decentres the framework of competition and which restores the significant contribution made by these overlooked writers.

Melissa Bailes, *Regenerating Romanticism: Botany, Sensibility, and Originality in British Literature, 1750–1830* (University of Virginia Press): This book makes a significant contribution to re-

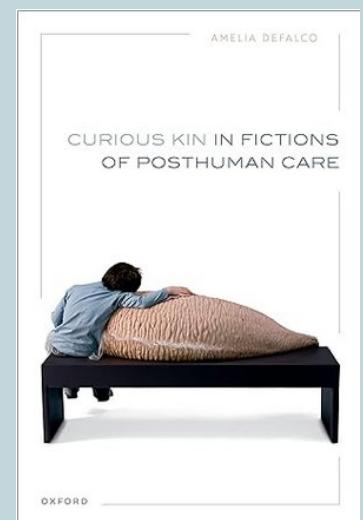


Heather A. Love, *Cybernetic Aesthetics: Modernist Networks of Information and Data* (Cambridge University Press): This book makes important contributions to the fields of literary modernism and literature and science through its topic and its novel methodology. Love lays out a compelling case for the significance of her research, articulating a long history of cybernetics and the importance of promoting the relation between cybernetics and literature working in both directions. Love also productively develops linguistic playfulness as a model for unpacking complex cybernetic concepts, opening up the methods of literary studies to other disciplines with her insistence on rich and sustained close reading *as* analysis (rather than *as* supplementary to it).



Amelia DeFalco, *Curious Kin in Fictions of Posthuman Care* (Oxford University Press): This book takes a complicated argument about the more-than-human by opening up and problematising ideas of and experiences of care, presenting it conversationally without losing track of the many nuances of each of its key concepts: curious, kin, the posthuman, care, and fiction. Importantly, it is alive to various audiences' needs in presenting how (and why) rethinking care in terms of the more-than-human relates to concerns about access and equity. *Curious Kin* draws connections to a wide range of existing scholarship, promoting urgently needed engagements. And it does so through a range of frequent, careful, and extensive close readings to demonstrate and clarify the argument and its stakes.

The judging panel is pleased to award this year's book prize to Amelia DeFalco's *Curious Kin in Fictions of Posthuman Care*.



# BSLS FUNDING UPDATES

## NEW SCHEME AND NEW DEADLINES

The Small Grants Scheme and the Postgraduate and Early Career Conference Fund are joined by a new scheme for funding research expenses, to help clarify the purpose of each of our regular efforts to promote the interdisciplinary study of science and literature.

The Small Grants Scheme is intended to support literature and science events, especially those with a public-facing component. Contact Sara Cole ([s.cole@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:s.cole@lancaster.ac.uk)) with queries and/or to apply; please put 'BSLS Small Grant' in the subject heading of e-mails.

The Postgraduate and Early Career Conference Fund is intended to support PGRs/ECRs presenting literature and science scholarship at conferences other than that of the BSLS. Contact Liliane Campos

([liliane.campos@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr](mailto:liliane.campos@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr)) with queries and/or to apply; please put 'BSLS PGR/ECR Fund' in the subject heading of e-mails.

The new Research Grants are intended to support archival research and similar activities, particularly those undertaken by PGRs, ECRs, and others who are under-funded or precariously employed.

In the short term, the old set of deadlines will continue, with the next one being 1 June 2024. Thereafter the funding application deadlines will be 30 September, 30 January, and 15 May (three deadlines per year).

See the website's [funding](#) page for additional details on all of these opportunities.

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*The next deadline for funding applications is 1 June 2024*

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## RECENT BSLS REVIEWS

Michael Brown reviewed Alana Skuse, *Surgery and Selfhood in Early Modern England: Altered Bodies and Contexts of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Carolina Ciucci reviewed Joan Passey, *Cornish Gothic, 1830-1912* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2023).

Caitlin Cronin reviewed Mark Foster Gage (ed.), *Aesthetics Equals Politics: New Discourses Across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2019).

Anna Dijkstra reviewed Angus Fletcher, *Storythinking: The New Science of Narrative Intelligence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

Sabina Dosani reviewed Stuart Murray, *Medical Humanities and Disability Studies: In/ Disciplines* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

Layla Ferrández Melero reviewed Ruta Baublyté Kaufmann, *The Architecture of Space-Time in the Novels of Jane Austen* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Erica Fretwell, reviewed Stefan Schöberlein, *Writing the Brain: Material Minds and Literature, 1800–1880* (Oxford: Oxford: University Press, 2023).



Please use this [link](#) or the QR code below to tell us about a book you'd like to review or a book the BSLS should review.



Sarah Hagaman reviewed Lara Choksey, *Narrative in the Age of the Genome: Genetic Worlds* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

Sharon Ruston reviewed:

- Chloe Germaine, *The Dark Matter of Children's 'Fantastika' Literature: Speculative Entanglements*, Bloomsbury Perspectives on Children's Literature (Bloomsbury, 2023).
- Paul Matthews, *Transparent Minds in Science Fiction: An Introduction to Alien, AI and Post-Human Consciousness* (Open Book Publishers, 2023).
- Jolene Zigarovitch, *Death and the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).

Vinita Singh reviewed Marie Allitt, *Medical Caregiving Narratives of the First World War: Geographies of Care* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

Jessica Thomas reviewed Douglas R. J. Small, *Cocaine, Literature, and Culture, 1876-1930* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

Alex Tischer reviewed:

- Gregory Lynall, *Imagining Solar Energy: The Power of the Sun in Literature, Science and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
- D. Graham Burnett and Justin E. H. Smith (eds), *Scenes of Attention: Essays on Mind, Time, and the Senses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

# PALGRAVE STUDIES IN LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND MEDICINE

## RECENT TITLES

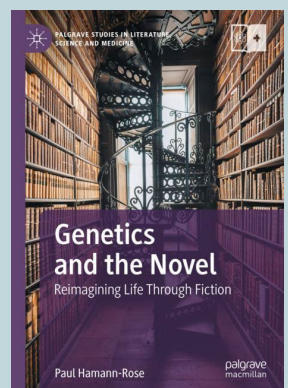
Tana Jean Welch, *Advancing Medical Posthumanism Through Twenty-First Century American Poetry*

This book places contemporary poetics in dialogue with posthumanism and biomedicine in order to create a framework for advancing a posthuman-affirmative ethics within the culture of medical practice. This book makes a case for a posthumanist understanding of the body—one that sees health and illness not as properties possessed by individual bodies, but as processes that connect bodies to their social and natural environment, shaping their capacity to act, think, and feel. Tana Jean Welch demonstrates how contemporary American poetry is specifically poised to develop a pathway toward a posthuman intervention in biomedicine, the field of medical humanities, medical discourse, and the value systems that guide U.S. healthcare in general.



Paul Hamann-Rose, *Genetics and the Novel*

This book argues that literary fiction has reimagined life in the age of genetics. The new genetic paradigm has proposed to rewrite core assumptions about such fundamental aspects of life as the nature of kinship and biological connection, human-environmental relations, or the link between biology and art. Investigating major texts of genetic fiction by A. S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Simon Mawer, and Margaret Atwood, this monograph offers the first systematic study of how these assumptions about life itself have been renegotiated through the contemporary novel's engagement with genetic science. This book identifies a significant new phase in the novel's aesthetic exploration of life and demonstrates that the novel emerges as the cultural form uniquely positioned to engage both the imaginative and concrete challenges raised by genetic science for the lifeworlds of the new millennium.



# CALLS FOR REVIEWERS

## BSLS REVIEWS

We have the following books for review, some in hard copy and others in pdf. Please contact Sharon Ruston, BSLs Reviews Editor, at [bslsreviews@gmail.com](mailto:bslsreviews@gmail.com) if you would like to review one of these books or any other book.

Epstein, Hugh, *Hardy, Conrad and the Senses* (Edinburgh UP, 2020)

Fyfe, Aileen, and Colin C. Kidd, eds., *Beyond the Enlightenment: Scottish Intellectual Life, 1790-1922* (Edinburgh UP, 2023)

Gupta, Suman, and Peter H. Tu, *The Practical Philosophy of AI Assistants: An Engineering-Humanities Conversation* (World Scientific, 2024)

King, Amy, *The Divine in the Commonplace: Reverent Natural History and the Novel in Britain* (CUP, 2019)

Kiryushina, Galina, Einat Adar and Mark Nixon, eds., *Samuel Beckett and Technology* (Edinburgh UP, 2021)

Lehmann, Olga V., and Oddgeir Synnes, eds., *A Poetic Language of Ageing* (Bloomsbury, 2023)

Muñoz-Rengel, Juan Jacinto, *A History of Lying* (Wiley, 2022)

Sankaran, Neeraja, *A Tale of Two Viruses: Parallels in the Research Trajectories of Tumor and Bacterial Viruses* (U of Pittsburgh P, 2021)

Sarkar, Debapriya, *Possible Knowledge: The Literary Forms of Early Modern Science* (U of Pennsylvania P, 2023)

Sutton-Mattocks, Julia, *Cures for Modernity: Medicine in Interwar Russian and Czech Literature and Cinema* (Peter Lang, 2023)

Taylor, Michael A., and Ralph O'Connor, eds., *The Old Red Sandstone or New Walks in an Old Field* by Hugh Miller (National Museums Scotland, 2022)

Wong, Amy, *Refiguring Speech* (Stanford UP, 2023)

Yunger-Halpern, Nicole, *Quantum Steampunk: The Physics of Yesterday's Tomorrow* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2022)

## FUTURE BSLS CONFERENCES

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, Barri Gold ([gold@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:gold@sas.upenn.edu)).

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

*bsls.ac.uk*