



The British Society for LITERATURE and SCIENCE

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SMALL GRANT EVENT 'THE LITERARY TWILIGHT ZONE: NONFICTIONAL FICTION, 1820 – 1920'

This symposium, organised by Emily Vincent and myself, was held at the University of Birmingham on 28 June. Its mission, as the title implies, was to understand the complex variety of genres, modes, and levels of truth claim paved over by the blunt terms 'fiction' and 'nonfiction'. We asked how authors in the long nineteenth century navigated this complexity, from constructing works of baffling fluidity to penning provocative thought experiments. Starting off Panel 1: Heterodox Knowledge, Ross Conway showed how Edgar Allan Poe's 'Some Words with a Mummy' satirised the work of Egyptological lecturers (and notorious racists) like George Gliddon, while Marijke Valk highlighted the role of spiritual interpretations of alchemy in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's metaleptic romance *A Strange Story* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

In Panel 2: Imagining Other Beings, Eleanor Dobson demonstrated that the Egyptian trappings of 'ancient Aliens' conspiracies can be traced back to journalist-astronomer Garrett P. Serviss's bombastic novel *Edison's Conquest of Mars*. Next, John R. Schaefer

took us into the botanical world, tracing the influence of Charles Darwin's *Insectivorous Plants* in periodical culture, where it helped to spawn a genre of predatory plant fiction (alongside dubious works of purported veracity). Panel 3: The Facts of Faith foregrounded religious belief. Jennifer Moriarty used Margaret Oliphant's short stories to challenge understandings of literary realism reliant on outdated secularisation theses; Rebecca Styler showed how utopias like Eveleen Mason's *Hiero-Salem* functioned as sites of countercultural religious revision; and Clare Stainthorp examined the ways in which George Egerton's occult-tinged epistolary *Rosa Amorosa* provocatively resists classification.

Gordon Bates, speaking in Panel 4: Medical Fictions, detailed the productive collaboration behind the medical mystery stories of L. T. Meade, written with the assistance of a doctor, and Apryl Denny Bottner explored the complicated homosexual symbolism of Bram Stoker's famous *Dracula*. We concluded proceedings with Tatiana Kontou's keynote: this fascinating paper used psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's concepts of play and the transitional object to navigate between pillars of fact and fiction, ending with a nuanced analysis of the ludic origins of the notorious 'Cottingley Fairy' photographs promoted by Arthur Conan Doyle. Thank you to the BSLs for the generous Small Grant, which helped to bring speakers to this event (further funded by the Leverhulme Trust) from both within and without the UK.

—Richard Fallon
University of Birmingham

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

Summer 2023 Newsletter

BSLS FUNDING REPORT

ADAPTATION 2023

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY - MADRID

Thanks to the generous support of the British Society for Literature and Science through their Postgraduate Conference Fund, I was able to attend an interdisciplinary conference on adaptation in Madrid in April. The conference was focused on the notion that adaptation is a term shared by both Literature and Biology, and as such, featured work on this topic from across related disciplines. This conference was fairly small, which meant I had the opportunity to hear every paper as none were scheduled at overlapping times. It also meant that over the course of the conference, all the participants had the opportunity to engage in discussions regarding the papers we were all hearing and the work we are all currently undertaking. These discussions both at the end of panels and during breaks was one of the best parts of the conference in terms of my academic growth.

One highlight from the conference was a keynote from John Holmes (University of Birmingham) entitled ‘Adapting Hobbits.’ In his paper, Professor Holmes looked at both the literary side of this topic—from Tolkien’s words and writings to cinematic and televisual adaptations—and the paleoanthropological aspects of this subject—including biology, prehistory, and archaeology. There were also a range of panels on subjects ranging from Evolution, Text, and Technology to Film Adaptation to Translation and Adapting the Humanities. I learned a great deal about

subjects ranging from AI to mushrooms to theatrical musicals.

The paper I gave was titled: ‘A *Tempest* of Technology: Adapting Darwin and Shakespeare in *Ex Machina*.’ In this paper, I introduced some of my PhD research for the first time at an academic conference. In my research, I argue that literary adaptation is not a single process, but rather a spectrum of processes, which I explicate through the physics of light: optics. My paradigm for understanding adaptation has five components: reflection, refraction, polarization, diffraction, and application. I argue that each of these five positions on the adaptive spectrum offer unique forms. The paper I gave focused on one specific case study of diffracted adaptation, namely, the 2014 film *Ex Machina* and how it can usefully be read as an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. I got a great deal of helpful feedback on my paper, which I will incorporate into my analysis of this case study within the diffraction chapter of my thesis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank not only the conference organizers, who made this conference so welcoming and fruitful, but also the BSLS. As a self-funded, international postgraduate student in the UK, I would not have been able to travel to Madrid to attend this conference without the generous support of the BSLS. I am truly grateful you awarded me with this opportunity.

—Emma de Beus

CONFERENCE REPORT:

THE DAVY NOTEBOOKS PROJECT

‘SCIENCE AND/OR POETRY: INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN NOTEBOOKS’

26 – 27 JULY 2023, LANCASTER

Through my involvement in the Charles Lyell Project at the University of Edinburgh I was fortunate enough to be invited, alongside my colleagues Pamela McIntyre and Gillian McCay, to attend and present a paper at a two-day conference in Lancaster. With an early rise, we began a picturesque journey through the purple-speckled vales and hills of the Scotland-England Border, past the mist-covered lakes and on to the cobbled streets leading to Lancaster Castle. As we climbed to the large and imposing battlements, we

were met with the hospitality of our delightful hosts from Lancaster University. After a much-needed coffee and a short introduction from The Davy Notebooks Project team, the conference commenced (<https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/davynotebooks/about/>).

Papers by Sonia Hofkosh (Tufts) and Jeff Cowton (Wordsworth Grasmere) delved into the phenomenology and biography of individual notebooks and commonplace books. The interactions of a notebook in its life bring its overall privacy into

question. Is a private notebook a collective project? This was a discussion which stemmed particularly from Lois Linkens' (De Montfort) paper on the psychology of Coleridge's dreams which he recorded in his notebook. Such interdisciplinary study highlights how personal notebooks can be and brings into question the author's self-awareness at the time of writing.

The interdisciplinary in notebooks was particularly evident in Pamela McIntyre, Gillian McCay, and William Adams' (Edinburgh) paper on research involving the 294 notebooks of Charles Lyell, with each person representing a separate discipline and highlighting the benefits of the cross-pollination of backgrounds in understanding how his notebooks were used. This was explored further through an interesting initiative led by Katie McNab (Science Museum) where scientific collection items have been re-imagined through poetic interpretation encouraged by the public.

Throughout the conference, the anatomy of a notebook was discussed heavily. When does something become a notebook? And how can the institutional position change the meaning of pre-disciplinary work? Matthew Eddy (Durham) states that the way information is recorded in notebooks is learned behaviour suggesting the authors have scientific knowledge and insight. This is particularly interesting in the discussion of the speculative involvement of the amanuenses of notebooks.

Multiple authorship in notebooks was discussed further in Natalie Harries' (IES, London/Aberdeen) paper where palaeographic analysis was used to

highlight plagiarism in commonplace books.

Reconstructing lives through notebooks was discussed in the paper of Elizabeth Godmer (Hull) where Sara Teasdale's poetry could only be rediscovered through her notebooks. This highlights how a notebook is not always a rough preliminary stage and can offer better insights than the published work.

In the keynote address and final paper of the conference Dahlia Porter (Glasgow) referred to notebooks as a 'prompt for memory', and as I write up this article from the hastily scribbled words in my own notebook, I realise this to be a relatable view in my case but not an absolute certainty. The array of papers presented at this conference highlight that the purpose of a notebook is very much dependent on the author/authors and there is no one way a notebook can be used. Covering a range of information from multiple contributors, notebooks require further interdisciplinary study to ameliorate our understanding of the way they were used by each author.

Overall, the conference gave excellent insight into the different approaches of studying notebooks from multiple disciplines. I entered the conference from a background leaning closer to the scientific; however, after this two-day crash course in English literature, I return to study the notebooks of Charles Lyell with a broadened perspective of the world in which he was working and a better understanding of the influences this would have had on his writings.

—William Adams

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Asha Hornsby. "A slashing review is a thing that they like": Vivisection and Victorian Literary Criticism'. *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 12 June 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcad012>

This article explores how analogies of writing as vivisection were employed in late-Victorian literary debates. Surveying the newspapers and periodicals of the period demonstrates that such terminology was remarkably sprawling in terms of the genres and authors it was applied to and the meanings it conveyed. Essayists and reviewers also used metaphors relating to experimental physiology's *modus operandi* to shape and articulate key methodological and ideological principles that were emerging in late-Victorian literary-critical theory and practice. These included discussions of how to analyse living authors and contemporary works, conceptualizations of whether critical operations should produce social benefits, and considerations of the aesthetic and technical opportunities that literary or critical vivisection offered or, indeed, prevented.

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

Merrilees Roberts, 'The eroticization of sleep in the poetry of John Keats', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 2023, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efad014>

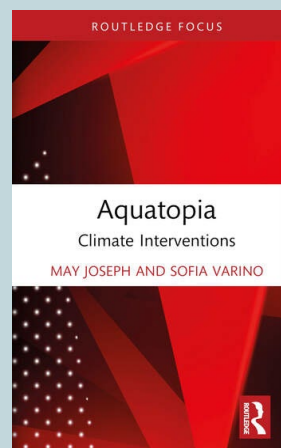
This essay contends that in Keats' poetry, sleep-states (rather than dreams) become a site of erotic intensity and power-play. Contemporary scientific literature such as Robert Gray's *The Theory of Dreams* suggested that in sleep, 'the senses, though capable of being aroused, are closed in insensibility'. I draw upon this thinking to show that through depictions of sleep, Keats creates a paradoxical, knowing eroticism where the senses are aroused even though the will is suspended. It is not that the continuum between dreaming and waking is eroticised, but that sleep becomes a highly controlled private space that is insistently open to sensory suggestion. By focusing on sleep as an embodied sensory experience, I show how in Keats's work the uncoupling of agency and feeling creates an eroticism which tests the lines between surrender and consent, will and desire. Taking a new angle on what Byron considered to be a tendency towards euphemistic prurience in Keats's writing, this essay also proposes that Keats's interest in the erotic vulnerability of bodies to one another creates a negative capability, and an ethics, highly sensitised to the way the boundaries between self and world are maintained.

Sean Seeger and Daniel Davison-Vecchione, 'Daniel Bell, Social Forecasting, and Science Fiction', *Extrapolation*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2023), pp. 167–187. <https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2023.11> (open access)

This article argues that the work of the sociologist Daniel Bell can help to clarify science fiction's relationship to the future by (1) distinguishing between social forecasting and the prediction of future events; and (2) showing how social forecasting and science fiction can both provide a more or less plausible imaginative frame for raising, exploring, and making sense of the 'agenda of questions' that a future society is liable to confront. It goes on to argue that science fiction takes social forecasting a step further than Bell through its awareness of how such forecasting can bring about change in the present. This article therefore identifies one way in which sociology and science fiction can be mutually beneficial without reducing one to the other.

May Joseph and Sofia Varino. *Aquatopia: Climate Interventions*. Routledge, 2023. <
<https://www.routledge.com/Aquatopia-Climate-Interventions/Joseph-Varino/p/book/9781032326405>>

Aquatopia documents Harmattan Theater's ecological interventions and traces its engagements with water-bound landscapes, colonial histories, climate change, and public space across New York City, Venice, Amsterdam, Lisbon, and Cochin. The volume uses Harmattan's site-specific performances as a point of departure to consider climate change and rising sea levels as geographical, ecological, and urban phenomena. Instead of a collection of flat, static surfaces, the *Aquatopia* atlas is animated by a disorienting, anti-mapping strategy, producing a deterritorialized, nomadic, fluid atlas unfolding in real time as an archive of climate change in multidimensional, active space. The book is designed for pedagogical access, with interludes that consolidate the learning outcomes of the experimental theory animating each site-specific performance.



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.

CALL FOR PAPERS

THE INVISIBLE ORIENTATION: THE EFFACEMENT OF ASEXUALITY MARCH 7-10 2024 BOSTON

This panel seeks papers offering new perspectives on asexuality and welcomes research coming from all humanities investigating the ways in which asexuality has been constructed historically, socially, and in media representation.

Critic Angela Sondra Decker defines asexuality as ‘the invisible orientation’ to describe how this sexual orientation is often under-discussed and under-represented. Defined generally as the non-experience of sexual attraction, asexuality has often been effaced from public and critical discourses.

In 2023, asexuality has finally attained some attention, with brilliant titles such as *Ace Voices* (2023) and *Sounds Fake but OK* (2023) coming out recently. These works have revealed the ongoing stereotyping and misunderstanding of asexuality: often confused with celibacy, asexuality is stigmatized, with ace representation being either absent from contemporary media or depicted as a pathology, intrinsically connected to intellectuality, monstrosity, and/or emotional coldness.

Following this increased interest in this sexual orientation, this panel wants to offer an opportunity for academics investigating cultural representations of asexuality to come together. Concentrating academic attention on asexuality relocates this orientation from the margin to the centre of theoretical discourse and allows for the questioning of stigmas regarding asexuality. Welcoming perspectives coming from all the humanities, this panel wants to offer new approaches regarding this sexual orientation.

Topics can include but are not limited to: the historical construction of asexuality as pathology; literary and media exclusion or inclusion of asexuality; the ways in which asexuality has been effaced from LGBTQ+ discourse; considerations of the co-constructed nature of asexuality across media and medical discourses.

The Closing Date for Submissions is the **30th of September 2023**. Please submit a paper through the NEMLA Portal, which can be found here: <<https://www.cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/20352>>

CALL FOR REVIEWERS

The *Journal of Literature and Science* (<http://www.literatureandscience.org>) is 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 (m.geric@westminster.ac.uk).

The list is certainly not definitive, and I would 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: <https://www.literatureandscience.org/> or contact me at gericm@westminster.ac.uk to register your interest.

—Michelle Geric
Journal of Literature and Science

SUGGESTED ARTICLES:

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*.”
- Graham Matthews, “Science, Scientists, and Prehistories of SSK in Mid-Twentieth-Century British Literature.”
- 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 *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*.”

From *Modernist Cultures*:

- Emma Felin, “A Peculiar Kind of Particularity: Plants and Animals in Marianne Moore's Early Poetry.”

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.”

From *Romanticisms*:

- Jennifer Wallace, “*Beachy Head*, Ancient Barrows and the ‘Alembic’ of Romantic Archaeological Poetics.”
- Tim Fulford, “Mont Blanc Imagined: Poetry, Science and the Prospect-View in Davy and Coleridge.”
- Philip Lindholm, “‘Mountains, glowing hot’: The Radical Volcanic Aesthetics of Wordsworth's Early Poetry.”

From *Victorian Literature and Cultures*:

- Christopher Harrington, “Cut it, woman”: Masculinity, Nectar, and the Orgasm in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849).”
- 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.”

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THREE SOCIETIES ON LITERATURE AND SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM 10 – 12 APRIL 2024

For 2024, the annual conference of the BSLs will be part of a joint event combining with the annual conference of the European Society for Literature, Science and the Arts and the biennial conference of the Commission on Science and Literature. The International Conference of Three Societies on Literature and Science will be fully hybrid. Confirmed plenary speakers include Brian Hurwitz, Emeritus Professor of Medicine and the Arts at King's College London; Isabel Jaen Portillo, Professor of Spanish at Portland State University; and the Directors of three interdisciplinary research institutes at the University of Birmingham. In addition to the main conference programme running 10-12 April, there will be tours available, including options for in-person visits to the BIFoR FACE forest research facility or the Ruskin Land forest site on 13 April. The full CFP is expected in September and will be linked from the BSLs website, with proposals due by 1 December.

FUTURE BSLs CONFERENCES

BSLs 19, BIRMINGHAM, 10-12 APRIL 2024, JOINTLY WITH COSciLIT AND SLSAEU

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).

bsls.ac.uk