

Introduction: The State of the Unions

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The seeds for this special issue of the *Journal of Literature and Science* were sown in 2014 when Will Tattersdill and Melissa Littlefield found themselves talking about literature, science, lie detectors, and dinosaurs at the "Objects of Modernity" symposium hosted by the University of Birmingham, UK. As the conversation turned to methodology, the two noted some potentially striking differences between UK and US Literature and Science scholarship. Thanks to a BRIDGE project grant between the University of Birmingham (UK) and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (US), Tattersdill and Littlefield were able to pursue their questions through a two-day symposium on the topic of "Literature and Science: A Transatlantic Exchange." Their ambition was to investigate the differences and divisions between the US and the UK; but what they found instead was a surplus of solidarities. Discussion turned, as it often does, to a history of the field, including the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts (US) and the British Society for Literature and Science, and to the question: are distinctions between methods, proper objects, and milieu in the US and UK merely artifacts of the past? By the end of the symposium, a plan was hatched to curate two conjoined special issues, one in the UK and one in the US.

Thanks to the enthusiastic endorsement of Martin Willis, editor of the *JLS*, and Rajani Sudan, co-editor (with Littlefield) of *Configurations*, the four of us planned a two-part Special Issue on the "State of the Unions." Collectively, we chose "State of the Unions" as our theme because it captures the initially proposed UK/US division, the question of historical precedent versus contemporary experience, and the conjunctions of literature, science, technology, and the arts that are the very heart of the field. Via a widely distributed CFP, we invited scholars from all career stages to submit work; we also solicited original essays from longstanding Literature and Science scholars across the US and the UK. In both cases, our call included the following prompts:

1. What are the meanings of interdisciplinarity in the field of Literature and Science?
2. What is the place of Literature and Science within the academy?
3. What kinds of international variations or international synergies exist?
4. How and where is collaborative work taking place between literature/arts and the scientific community?
5. How do we (now) define "literature" in the dyad of literature and science?
6. What is the relationship between cultural theory and historicism in the field?
7. How is Literature and Science evolving in relation to its own splintering (into animal studies, neuroscience, environmental studies, etc.)?
8. What is the future of the field?

Because of the unique two-part nature of this double special issue, readers have the opportunity to react, respond, build from, and challenge the work in this first

collection of perspectival essays. If you are interested in responding to this issue and/or you have a particular perspective on the field of Literature and Science, Will Tattersdill and Rajani Sudan will edit the companion volume to be published by *Configurations* in 2018 – keep an eye out for the CFP!

Why Now?

Presciently, the germination of this issue happened during the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Society for Literature and Science (1985). Reaching the 30-year mark is a testament to the power of the founding members' visions for the field, visions shared by other scholars of the early 1980s who contributed in equally valuable ways. The questions that can now be posed, the intersections that are recognized, and the potential to create entire landscapes and careers around literature and science are owed to these originating scholars. And, as many of us recognize, these terrains are shifting, fracturing, and splintering in productive ways. Literature and Science scholarship has had a hand in creating posthumanism, animal studies, the digital humanities, the environmental humanities, and graphic medicine, just to name a few. It has been influential within its originating discipline of literary studies, most especially on interdisciplinary ways of working. It has also been influential in other disciplines; particularly in the history of science, the history of medicine and in medical humanities. So where do we stand? Is Literature and Science still a viable rubric for our work? Will Literature and Science continue to gain prominence in the academy? What are the challenges for the field as we move into an ever uncertain political, environmental, and scholastic future?

Moreover, the Society for Literature and Science has morphed and changed over the past decade. First, by officially incorporating "the arts" into its masthead and, more recently, by expanding worldwide. One can now attend SLSA gatherings in Europe and Australia, with more locations planned each year. Similarly, the British Society for Literature and Science has over the past few years increasingly turned to questions of the methodological foundations of the field. Fuelled by a plenary lecture by the Society's co-founder, Alice Jenkins, at the annual conference held in Cardiff in 2011, and subsequently enhanced by joint sessions investigating methods of research held jointly with the SLSA in Europe (across two annual conferences), the ways in which literature and science research in Britain is evolving has become a more common subject of discussion.

Situating Ourselves

As editors of the major journals in the field of Literature and Science, we situate ourselves as archivists of the past, guardians of the field's foothold, and vanguards of the continuing interdisciplinary revolution. We recognize that as Literature and Science has expanded in breadth and prominence, so too have the number of interdisciplinary venues for scholarship. *JLS* and *Configurations* are not the sole publishers of topics relating to the cultural, historical, and theoretical literatures of science, technology, and engineering. We recognize the need to adapt, to (re)define, and to reconsider, even as we hold fast to some of the foundational hopes for the field. This two-part special issue is as much about learning from our past as it is about facing the future. What is Literature and Science now? Where have we come from? As editors, what can we do to shepherd the field through this next, twenty-first century?

For this first issue on "The State of the Unions," one of our prime directives was to encourage a blend of senior and junior scholars. To that end, the issue includes articles from some of the field's founders alongside articles by emergent scholars who pose some interesting and challenging questions. Our second, and related directive was to capture the field as in a polaroid: to see what emerges as the light strikes the photographic paper; to represent the field – sometimes warts and all – without flinching; and to recognize that this, too, is a fleeting representation of what the field has been and could become. We seek to encourage new paths for Literature and Science; to see the field as expanding, not contracting. We seek to solidify a kind of scholarly inquiry without stultifying its future possibilities. Finally, we wanted to remain true to this issues' origins and offer perspectives from both the US and the UK. That aspect of this issue, in particular, has been revealing. While we spoke above about the "surplus of solidarities" between the different varieties of the field as they are practised in different national contexts, it became apparent that these contexts continue to exert considerable influence on the range of reference, political and institutional perspectives, and variable valuing of past, present and future. Solidarity is also, then, the foundation for difference. Yet the field's pluralism is, in our view, a strength: one way of knowing that a field has a productive future is in the richness and diverse life of its soil. What that future might be is the challenging question we hope to begin to answer.

Overview: Scholars in Dialogue

In lieu of a paper by paper overview, we offer instead the starting point for larger discursive engagements. Indeed, by placing some of the authors in annotated dialogue here, we hope to spark ideas for responses that might appear in the companion volume of *Configurations* next year. Here, then, are some of the things we noticed about this particular set of essays.

Several contributors focus attention on the gaps and absences in the field. Both Dihal and Lee, for instance, note the lack of attention to postcolonial critique within literature and science and they suggest that this is indicative of wider concerns about what the field has concurred is central and consequently what is marginal. Indeed, as Wagner and Wharton argue, there should be a greater desire in the field to seek out those sciences, texts, and objects seen to be side-lined or at least not given a clear and authoritative voice in current critical practice. For Labinger, this remains true for scientific involvement in literature and science research. There remain very few active scientists at work in the field and no real agenda that seeks to address this. For O'Connor, the lack extends to different genres of science writing, and particularly popular science, which remains firmly in the shadows.

Unsurprisingly, then, there are several contributors here that take an increasingly granular view of the field: arguing that expansion into new territory means focussing in fresh ways on specific arenas that are either marginalized or not captured adequately or finely enough by the terms literature and science. For Lieberman this is true of the relationship between literature and technology, while Dihal would see science fiction as similarly derogated. There are two ways to view these perspectives. Either the field of Literature and Science will begin to break-up into smaller derivations as it evolves, or it will begin to accrue other territories. It is perhaps more likely that the latter is the field's immediate future and that it is already (and perhaps for the first time here articulated) in the early stages of accrual. It may be that we need to make greater sense of the field so as to make room for the presently

marginalized? Holmes, certainly, makes a case for consilience rather than fragmentation: a concerted effort to articulate those practices within the field that are universally shared and valued.

Undoubtedly, a greater self-consciousness about our methods is already apparent. There is a turn, for example, among several contributors towards employing present methodologies and practices to inform both contemporary and historical research in the field. This is clear in Shuttleworth's reading of citizen science and also of Otis's sense of the increasingly valuable place of the digital. Additionally, and sometimes implicitly, these critics, and others such as Squier, point to the democratization of knowledge as key to literature and science's future. If things are becoming more democratic, then this is perhaps a result of a broader, and longer standing ethical turn in the humanities. Wolfe, Nash and Droge all speak to that aspect of the field, and particularly to the value of literature and science scholarship in delivering an ethical criticism. Wolfe is particularly conscious of the necessity of defending the critical perspectives we have developed to critique the contemporary scientific world, and his perspective is shared by Droge in her focus on teaching literature and science. Nash, more explicitly, sees our work taking place within a global ethical perspective that emerges from work on the non-human and the environment.

A Note on Organization

One thing we wished to avoid was making decisions for the readers of this issue by placing together articles in combinations that limited the cross-fertilization of histories, themes, ideas, prognoses or solutions. Nor, however, did we wish to abandon all sense of the issue as a collected set of concerns by simply listing, for example, the articles in some form of alphabetical order. We have, therefore, decided upon a series of themed sections that take us from a reflection on our origins through our present positions to our potential futures. Within and across these sections we invite readers to contemplate their own interconnections.