

RESEARCH STAY AT THE RACHEL CARSON CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

As a visiting doctoral student at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich this July, I have had the opportunity, through funding from the BSLS and my department, to work on my research project, which comes from a thesis chapter that explores how pesticides and vegetation growth were seen in Rachel Carson's and in Margaret Atwood's works (from *Surfacing* and *Survival* [1972] to *Oryx and Crake* [2003] and *The Year of the Flood* [2009]). Having access to their library, which houses a one-of-a-kind collection in the environmental humanities has been extremely helpful to start this project. As well as working on my research, I have made the most of this exciting opportunity, attending weekly Works-in-Progress forums, a lunchtime colloquium, and even German lessons. I've discussed my research with the Center Director, Prof. Dr. Christof Mauch, and I have presented my work at the Synergic Symposium. This Symposium ended in a performance in which I played the keyboards and Huiying Ng (who is a current doctoral candidate) and Olusegun Stephen Titus sang, premiering some of music in the book



entitled, 'African Ecomusicology: Blood and Oil'. The feedback I received from fellows and PhD candidates after sharing my work was very positive, and I had some interesting questions that have inspired me to develop some aspects of my work further. It has been an incredible experience to be able to be surrounded by such a welcoming group of scholars and to be able to share research within the interdisciplinary fields of literature and science and environmental humanities.

—Gemma Curto
PhD Candidate, The University of Sheffield



DEGREE CONFERRED

Jim Scown

Soil, Science, and the English Realist Novel: 1840-1872

My thesis, supervised by Martin Willis (Cardiff) and Ralph Pite (Bristol), examines soils in mid-nineteenth-century literary realism and science. For novelists and scientists of the period, soils offered access to truthful knowledge of the world. This is my primary argument. In novels by Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, soil description situates studies of lived experience in a material world that is empirically verifiable as it is dirtied and imperfect. In the same years, chemists were developing new methods of analysis and experimentation to explore soils as never before; Justus von Liebig's organic chemistry promised to reveal the constituent minerals of soils and how these were assimilated by plants. My thesis unearths a shared interest in soils across literature and science of the period, augmenting the established conception of a psychological realism by revealing a novel form examining matter as well as mind. (Awarded by Cardiff University, July 2021)



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