

ST DEINIOL'S



Hawarden
, Wales
4th-7th
January
2010



Featuring Celebrity David Hartleys...



Picture taken by
the excellent Paul
Craddock!

My week at St Deiniol's



So, my week in Wales has come to an end, and I'm already missing the great people I've met and all the fantastic conversations we've been able to have! I was surprised at how well I got to know people in such a short space of time, and I'm really pleased that I have such a great cohort of LitSciMed friendships to take away from the course!



The library

(theology section)

Day one got off to a great start, finding out about everybody's research interests, and by the first plenary lecture, I already felt that I'd got to know the group!

Charlotte Sleigh began with a fascinating discussion concerning the "coincidence" that was the simultaneous births of the novel and modern science. Charlotte pointed out that both were about the quest for Truth and meaning during an otherwise troubled period where anxieties about truth claims were prominent. I was particularly interested to be reminded of the fragility of the 1660s, circumstances which meant that the formation of the Royal Society was necessarily controversial (since people were banned from meeting together privately for discussions). Reflecting on how the curtailment of what people were permitted to talk about limited the Royal Society's scope, and must have dictated research, my attention was drawn to the artificial conception we can have of Science as a naturally objective discipline.

Our lecture really brought out the underlying political issues in the dedicatory epistle to the King in Sprat's text; my group were interested in the irony that such a letter was actually produced two years *after* the society had first met. In our discussions about the importance of vernacular and claims to objectivity, Sharon made an interesting reference to Donna Haraway, who argued that Scientists pertain to their disinterestedness, but should acknowledge their own prejudices and allegiances. So this session got us thinking in general about to what extent Science can claim to be outside of ideology and subjectivity; the comparison with twentieth century thought brought out the power of historical context to determine how we view Science.





- ▣ Session One – Dr Mark Llewellyn. It was great to hear from Mark about his own brilliant work in the library, and about Gladstone's coding system for his reading! Mark talked to us about **GladCat**, and the detailed searches it produces which sound really useful, taking into account Gladstone's own notes. This was generally a really important session in learning more about the "man behind the books", and the history of the library itself.



- ▣ Especially exciting for me was being able to see Gladstone's own copies of *Observations on Man*. Both volumes had annotations and I was able to identify the coding system from Mark's notes (from the number of + signs it seemed Gladstone enjoyed Hartley's text, and was obviously particularly keen on the religious sections!) I hadn't even seen another copy of *Observations*, so being able to handle a copy that had been read by someone so prominent was fascinating.

Gladstone's annotations...

and of the rational faculty. But I no ways presume to determine whether matter can be endued with sensibility, or whether it is foreign to the purpose of the argument, that there is a distinction, of one kind or other, between the sensations of the soul, and the motions excited in the medullary substance of the brain; which is what all physicians and philosophers allow.

I would not therefore be any way interpreted so as to oppose the immateriality of the soul. On the contrary, I see clearly, and acknowledge readily, that matter and motion, however subtly divided, or reasoned upon, yield nothing more than matter and motion still. But then neither would I affirm, that this consideration affords a proof of the soul's immateriality. In like manner the unity of consciousness seems to me an inconclusive argument. For consciousness is a mental perception; and if perception be a monad, then every inseparable adjunct of it must be so too, *i. e.* vibrations, according to this theory, which is evidently false. Not to mention, that it is difficult to know what is meant by the unity of consciousness.

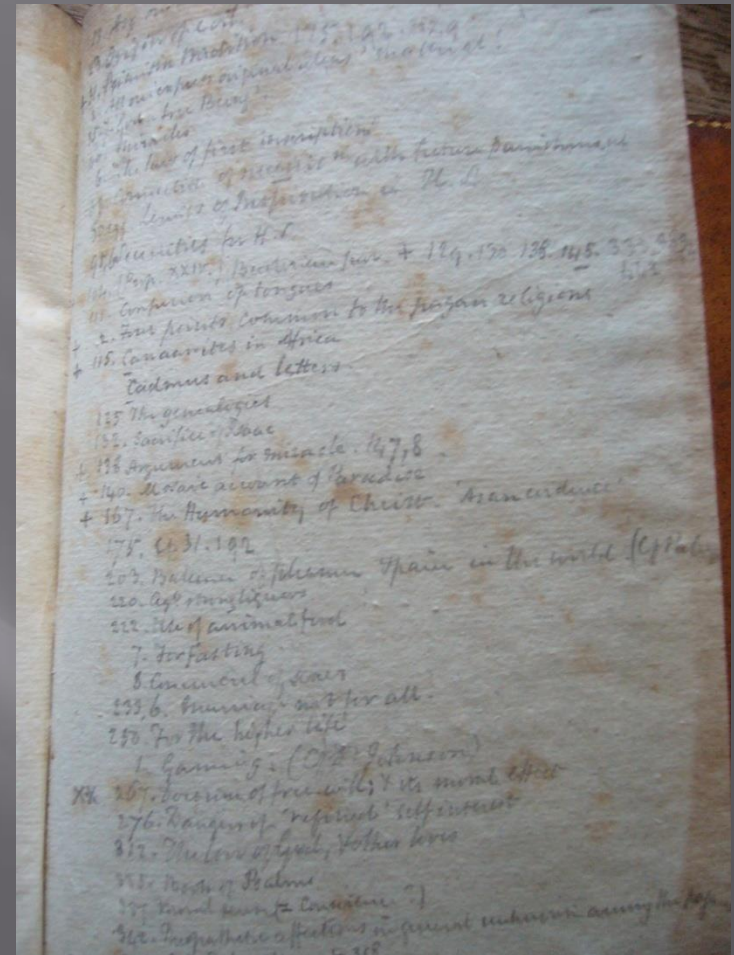
But it is most worthy of notice, that the immateriality of the soul has little or no connection with its immortality; and that we ought to depend upon him who first breathed into man the breath of the present life, for our resurrection to a better. *All live unto him.* And if we depend upon any thing else besides him, for any blessing, we may be said so far to renounce our allegiance to him, and to idolize that upon which we depend.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

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W. Eyres, Printer, Horse-Market.

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Gladstone, and more notes!

One of my favourites sessions of the week was Session Two, “Mono- Inter- Multi-disciplinarity”. It was excellent to be given the opportunity to actually reflect on my own discipline, and hear from other people. Sharon asked us to answer three questions: What was our discipline (only choosing one!), how did we know this, and finally, which other disciplines did we work in... Especially interesting was how difficult some people found question one (a question I found very simple to answer!) Hearing from the group really emphasised how unique each person’s research was, and it was really fascinating to reflect on how strongly connected each person felt towards their various disciplines. I realised that the way each of us approached a text, and what we valued, really defined our method, and therefore the discipline we felt most at home in.



I was aware of how strongly I identify with English Literature as my discipline, and I actually found it difficult to think about the other disciplines my research really depends on. Listening to other people from the History of Medicine and History emphasised how central aesthetic concerns and the general reading experience are to my way of thinking. It became apparent that the questions we are interested in asking reflect our disciplines and indicate how they diverge.

Getting together in this session into disciplinary groups was also really enjoyable and fascinating, since I don't think research students ever really get to talk in such detail about what they do (or in our case, what English Literature and Literary criticism is!) Spending time in these kinds of debates made me realise how vital and helpful it is to speak to colleagues.

We had to discuss our discipline's "Concerns", "Methods" and "Vocab" and realised that while we had some common priorities (like close reading and textual analysis), we were more divided in the importance we gave to other aspects of our approach, such as theory or aesthetics.

We realised that even within our discipline, each person's methods were necessarily different, which is what makes English Literature so diverse and fascinating.

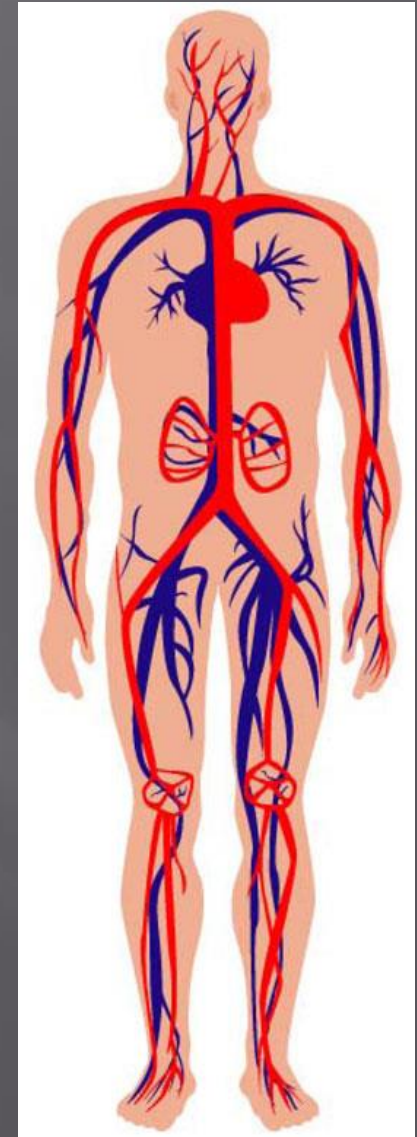


I think the overriding questions we came back to were "What *is* English Literature?" and "What is the **value** of Literature?". These are the questions that Literary critics are united in and need their own special approach to answer. Chatting "across the disciplines" was helpful in disallowing us to take the unique nature of our discipline's identity for granted; it was also important because we had to account for our approach to others, and recognise how other methods could be useful. I was particularly fascinated to hear about the differences between inter- and multi- disciplinary work and the issues that such research implies.

Stephanie Snow's session on the "History of Medicine" was fascinating and so useful in alerting us to the **continuities** in history, as well as the differences. It was impressive to be given an overview of medicine from the Ancient Greeks until the present day in such detail; particularly striking to me was how the **Holistic approach** to the body reoccurs. I was fascinated to hear about Galen, the four humours, and the idea of "balance" which resonates so strongly with alternative therapies and our general understanding of the body today.

I had been used to seeing Medicine as a continual and fairly steady series of developments and advances, but Stephanie really brought out the human element of medical research for me, that is, how scientists themselves, and societies, could still maintain incorrect or older views because of the strength of their beliefs: myths and traditional assumptions surrounding medical issues could (and still do!) actually overrule the discoveries themselves. Stephanie summed this up for me when she pointed out that even after 1800, blood-letting was practised widely as people clung on to a more Galenic and seemingly "logical" idea of balance, despite William Harvey's theory nearly two hundred years before. Following on from this, when we came to discuss Harvey's "On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals" in detail, we found it difficult to determine if he was "revolutionary", and wondered if this label was more dependent on the assimilation of a theory in society at large, rather than the theory itself.

These issue of influence and dissemination became important in our discussions throughout the week, including those concerning how scientists write to encourage acceptance of their theories. Viewing medical texts as works of literature in this way, rather than simply a 'collection of facts' made me think about how I should reread the more Scientific sections of *Observations on Man* to contemplate *how* Hartley writes and *why*, as well as *what* he writes.



On Wednesday, Jerome talked with us about “Questions of Evidence” and the uses of manuscripts. I was really attracted to the idea that the material aspects of a book influence our ways of reading (Chartier, McGann) and that meaning and the physicality of a text can act upon one another. I had thought that considering the material aspects of a literary text would detract from an appreciation of its “meaning” and aesthetics, almost disparaging literature, but this session reminded me of the Lyrical Ballads and the care that was taken to present them in such a way that would specifically not detract from the meaning of the poems, but would instead attract a new, wider readership and way of reading; also of Blake, whose poems cannot really be appreciated without the vivid illustrations and engravings that accompany them (although they are published without them today). I would like to remain aware of how these issues enhance the text and alter the reading experience so I can gain a more holistic impression of how the texts I study were enjoyed in their own period.



I will also revalue the potential use of manuscripts for my project, since the archives should offer vital information to my work on the reception of David Hartley; looking at Hartley’s letters could prove to be important for my work on the development of his theoretical ideas.

Manuscripts

Roger Chartier *“No text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read; any comprehension of a writing, no matter what kind it is, depends on the forms in which it reaches the reader”*



Colin typing up on to the teaching blog, with the help of Josie and Louise! (above) Jerome, and Steve (right)





Trying to decipher Humphrey Davy's letter!

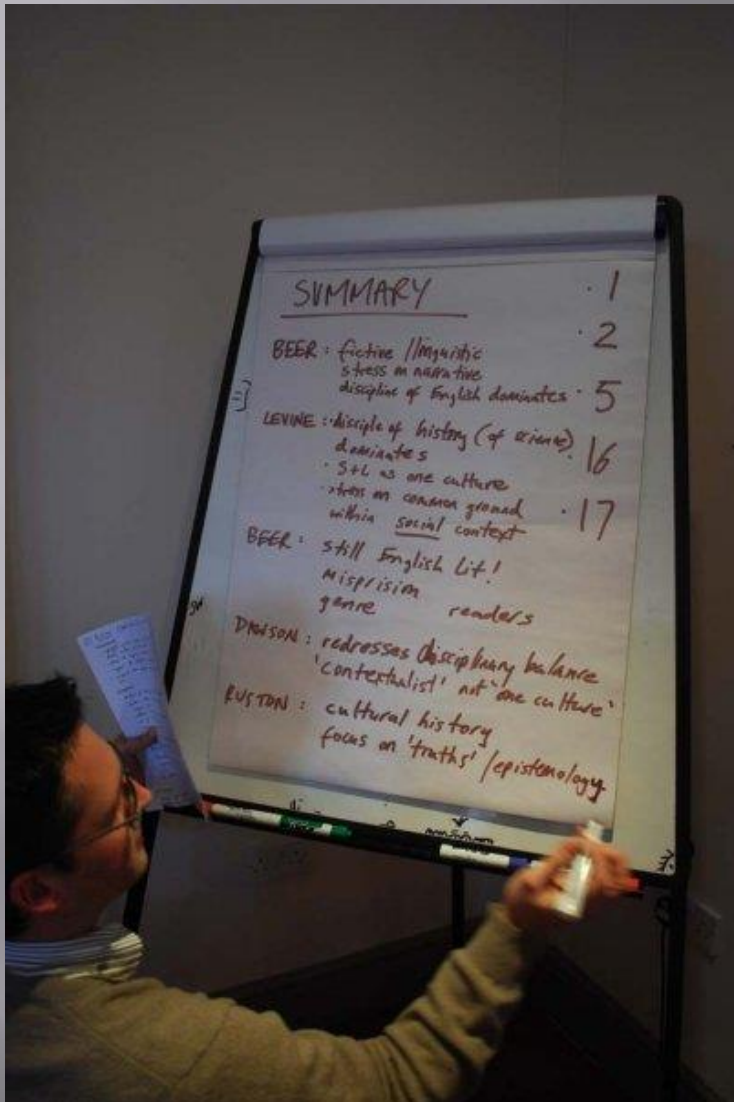
you - my first "fata" to me a composition
 exposing with to the Royal Society.
 in your hand at the Royal Society.

My dear Sir Joseph
 I have just off writing to
 you because I hoped to have had an opportunity
 to read with my likes, for the Royal
 Society - I have had opportunities of visiting
 papers which I hope would not be
 without interest - one on Volcanic phenomena
 & the other on the pyrolysis; but I have
 delayed finishing them in haste because
 every day gives me new information on
 these subjects. - Vesuvius has been in
 eruption ever since I have been here
 & the eruption has been of the most
 desirable kind for chemical objects, I have
 been able to determine both the nature
 of the pure & the products & the
 form that I think will be considered
 as first evidence respecting the cause
 of Volcanic fire. I have been able to find

There is nothing new. - Piazzi had not
 heard of Kater's report on the pendulum & he is
 working on the subject in the old way. Until
 you find any way of transmitting to him
 Kater's paper? - I am my dear Sir Joseph
 with profound respect & affec-
 tion
 your obliged H. Davy

This letter is counted

Nov. 28. Jan. 1820.



Martin, summarising our thoughts...

Session 6 was excellent and so rewarding in getting to grips with the main arguments of the course as a whole. Whereas before the week, I hadn't read Beer or Levine's work on Literature and Science, as a group we were now able to look at the texts more critically and see potential problems within the arguments.

We became particularly aware of the ways in which some of the critics (accidentally) still seemed to make Literature a passive recipient of Scientific ideas. This was especially clear in Levine's work where he stated: *'It is one culture, then, in two senses: first, in that what happens in science matters inevitably to what happens everywhere else, literature included: and second, in that it is possible and fruitful to understand how literature and science are mutually shaped by their participation in the culture at large'*. As Jeff pointed out, he seems to be throwing Literature and Science into a type of "bucket" called culture, and so evading the difficult issue of their interaction (particularly how Literature effects Society and Science). This reflects the general difficulty of quantifying and defining the value of Literature.

Despite any "problems" with Beer's 19th Century / Darwin-centred focus, I remain really excited by the possibilities that *"The Remnant of the Mythical"* opens up for literary criticism and the relationship between Science and Literature.



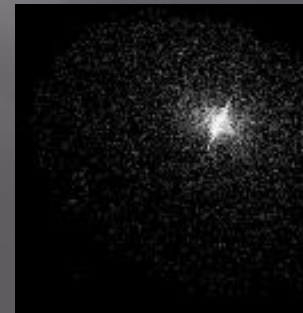
Gillian Beer

I feel that Beer's powerful opening to "The Remnant of the Mythical" deserves its own slide since it's SO great!!

Most major scientific theories rebuff common sense. They call on evidence beyond the reach of our senses and overturn the observable world. They disturb assumed relationships and shift what has been substantial into metaphor. The earth now only *seems* immovable. Such major theories tax, affront, and exhilarate those who first encounter them, although in fifty years they will be taken for granted, part of the apparently common-sense set of beliefs which instructs us that the earth revolved around the sun whatever our eyes may suggest. When it is first advanced, a theory is at its most fictive. The awkwardness of fit between the natural world as it is currently perceived and as it is hypothetically imagined holds the theory itself for a time within a provisional scope akin to that of fiction.

MACKAY (as quoted in Beer)

A remnant of the mythical lurks in the very sanctuary of science. Forms or theories ever fall short of nature, though they are ever tending to reach a position above nature, and may often be found to include more than the maker of them at the time knew.



Our final discussion about **Literary Darwinism** was an excellent conclusion to the week in Wales! We interrogated the purpose of the approach (with some trying to see its “positive sides”) but most of us grappling with describing our actual reasons for dislike. These centred around its reductionist goals, not to mention the arrogance in the intellectual imperialism it implies. It totally disregards the value of the Humanities (which we decided it may not be ashamed to admit). In the introduction we read by Jonathan Gottschall, he reflects proudly on his new-found Darwinist approach to literature that produced ‘*skepticism, hostility, and, most of all, fear*’ amongst the his fellow students and professors. He describes his impression of humanities criticism in a particularly scathing way: ‘*I believed that the hard social constructivism that dominated the humanities had been definitively exposed by numerous and redundant studies as a failed theory*’. In the same article, art is considered by the less severe David Sloan Wilson as ‘*a fundamental product of human nature, as a source of insight, and even as a source of data that can be analysed quantitatively*’.

Accepting Literary Darwinism as another way to look at texts is useful, but the method does not allow room for other approaches, which seems to be the main problem. As David Amigoni put it, each reading provided by Literary Darwinism can only be the same. For this reason, I can’t understand the longevity it feels so proud to own as one of its advantages or saving graces. It generally feels like a very discouraging way to think about literature as it misses the point of what literary criticism and Literature is, and is contemptuous of the sense of mystery that surrounds the arts. Although I’d like to think everyone is entitled to enjoy their experience of literature in the way they prefer, I am reminded of those neuroscientists who seek to override emotional and aesthetic explanations of the arts with their concept of “pleasure pathways” and reward systems in the brain; the biology just doesn’t account for human experience, feeling, aesthetics or value, and is it really interesting??

While Literary Darwinism’s appeal definitely rests on its reactionary status, it’s great to have it there to encourage literary critics to revalue and account for their work and the value of literature. I think David Amigoni’s conclusion in his review article is an excellent way to sum up the issue of Literary Darwinism:

“So while evolutionary analysis offers much to listen to, and is building some challenging bridging points, I would not wish to cede the Darwinists the authority to run the interdisciplinary show”





Thank you to everyone who organized this event, and to all the brilliant students who provided a lovely, kind atmosphere for my first paper, and made the workshops so great and interesting. Hope we meet again for more discussions very soon!!



And not forgetting the lovely tea and cake breaks in the dining room!! (Above: The lovely Naz, looking very civilized!) Taken by Paul again!