

Samantha Briggs

Event 1 St. Deiniol's Library

4 January, Day 1

The first day of the Literature, Science, and Medicine training program began with my arrival in Chester where I met fellow attendees Naz and Sophie. I must say that Chester appeared to be a very charming place and as we entered Hawarden I realized how fortunate I was not only to be spending a week in this beautiful part of Wales, but also to be a part of what proved to be an enlightening intellectual experience. Upon arrival at St. Deiniol's I had a lovely cup of tea and met a very friendly, unpretentious, and engaging group of people.

Charlotte Sleigh's lecture 'Empiricism and the Novel' reminded us that the birth of modern science and the birth of the novel took place in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The two fields were inextricably linked because, as Sleigh explained, they were both about the search for truth and meaning. I found it interesting that, while the purpose of the novel was a search for truth, the distinction between the novel as fact or fiction was often blurred. I was not familiar with the history of the Royal Society until I read Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society of London*. Sleigh explained that in 1660 the society was banned from publishing, discussing politics, and religion. They were only allowed to base their conclusions on experimentation. I think this is a very interesting topic as I cannot imagine a scientific society that separated itself from religion and politics or set out on experiments with the knowledge that they were unable to publish their findings.

I appreciated Mark Llewellyn's tour of the Gladstone Library because it gave us the history of the place we were staying by examining the books in its library. Llewellyn also discussed Gladstone's method of classification. As Josie has pointed out, this system is both cultural and personal. I am trying to pay more attention to the ways both scientists and novelists list and classify their work. As far as my research on Hardy and Eliot is concerned, it is necessary to find out which scientific texts they read. Llewellyn's guide to discerning whether or not a book in Gladstone's collection was actually read by him proved that there are oftentimes means through which a scholar may ascertain these facts.

The introductions and first set of presentations exposed me to diverse and novel ways in which the study of literature, science, and medicine could be approached. I realized that the opportunity to meet other research students and discuss their various projects was not only valuable for my research but also a perfect way of incorporating other disciplines into a specific field.

5 January, Day 2

We started the day by defining our disciplines which was a surprisingly difficult task. Although I am certain that I am in the field of English, once I start to consider all of the

sub-disciplines that define my research it starts to get slightly overwhelming. The field of English in particular is loosely defined and I think much of how one defines all that comprises English as a discipline depends upon how their specific department defines it.

One of the reasons I wanted to attend this event is because I am interested in the history of medicine but, until now, I have not had the opportunity to explore it at greater length. Stephaine Snow's lecture on the History of Medicine was very useful and informative. While she focused on the history of Western Medicine from 1500-1930, she discussed the background of medical knowledge, beginning with the Greeks. I did not realize that it was not until the Scientific Revolution that science was integrated into medicine in a way that it had never been before. It is interesting to see how the separation, or lack of separation between science and medicine is defined. Because my own research focuses on Victorian anthropology I continually see ways in which Darwinian sexual selection is related to the body or how theories are formed based upon historical conceptions about medicine and the body.

Medical historians (I apologize if I attach the wrong discipline to anyone) Louise, Jamie, and Rachel gave presentations on midwives and their tools, anthrax, and vomiting. Louise and Rachel in particular were willing to discuss their research at length over dinner and patiently answered my numerous questions regarding 19<sup>th</sup> century medical practices. I learned as much from them as I did from Snow's lecture.

6 January, Day 3

Jerome's discussion on Materiality and questions of evidence involved the interpretation of some rather difficult quotations regarding the text and textual criticism. Fortunately we were able to discuss these quotations by Chartier, McGann, and Genette with a partner. Jackie helped me make some sense of them. I learned that manuscripts show that there is no such thing as a stable text and the importance of examining the material itself before undertaking the process of analyzing it.

Martin Willis led us in a discussion on Literature and Science. He thoughtfully gave us an opportunity to read the sections of the essays before we discussed them which proved very useful. As far as Gillian Beer's works are concerned I am self-taught and it was nice to finally hear other people discuss her two-way movement approach to literature and science. *Darwin's Plots* stressed the literary foundation of scientific writing and although Beer has a tendency to place emphasis on Darwin, this literary foundation can be found in the works of numerous scientists, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After lunch we had a long break. As I had returned from the states only a few days before and had never really caught up on my sleep, I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to rest. However, I decided instead to panic about my presentation. It would appear I am not the only one who decided to write my presentation the day before I was scheduled to deliver it. All of the presentations that I had heard thus far were fascinating and I started to have doubts about my topic. It just seemed so typical to be in an English department, writing about Hardy and Eliot after hearing about such unique approaches to

the history of science and/or science and literature. However, I think the opportunity to discuss this with others allowed me to consider that there is so much I can do with my topic—so many different approaches I can take. Discussing other research projects helped me realize that one's work is always evolving and changing. I like to hear how people arrived at their particular topic. I think it is comforting to know that you are supposed to keep an open mind and that this is a process that does not suddenly happen overnight.

#### 7 January, Day 4

Lectures and discussion on our last day at St. Deiniol's focused on Scientists as Readers of Literature and the controversy surrounding Literary Darwinism. Gowan Dawson's lecture on Richard Owen examined scientists as readers of literature and the readers as historical entities. Considering current Darwin-centric scholarship Dawson pointed out that Victorian novels often referred to Owen rather than Darwin. This is interesting, given that Owen was one of the most prominent opponents of Darwinian evolution. I always have a tendency to associate the majority of Victorian novels as a reflection of Darwinian evolution and I need to remember that this is not always the case. Moreover, I often see the novelist as being informed by the scientist but Owen's writing, according to Dawson, is a perfect example of Beer's 'two way' street. The scientist is also informed by literature. I think the notion that ideas can be formed by the process of writing is also fascinating. That the terminology associated with paleontology was associated with serial publications reminds us to explore how ideas manifest themselves, particularly through the process of writing and in terms of how it is published.

Literary Darwinism is a theory that I have never really understood. When I was researching my MA thesis I came across Joseph Carroll's book without knowing anything about it. I tried reading it but it did not make any sense and I thought something was wrong with me. Apparently this wasn't the case because, because there are so many problems with Literary Darwinism....

#### 8 January, Day 5

Our last day was spent at Manchester and this is definitely a place I would like to revisit, preferably in the summer. The first place we visited was MOSI. After discussing the usefulness of object-based research we were divided into smaller groups in order to visit certain areas in the museum. We saw a number of steam engines which were far more intriguing than I ever would have imagined. I have considered how I might incorporate material objects into my research. I am still not sure how to write about objects and their relationship to 19<sup>th</sup> century literature but I think it is really useful. I think Sharon raised the question in the blog on object based research as to whether or not it is important to experience the physical world of the writers we study. This has always been a great concern of mine: to see a writer's home, the places they saw, the things they touched....I felt a sort of childish delight when I saw the steam engine in Manchester because it added a very atmospheric element to the industrial novels I have read. I am not sure what to make of it or how to write about it in an intellectual way, but it made me happy.

After this we visited the John Rylands library which seems to have a unique collection of texts. They had selected texts relating specifically to the history of science. Once again, we were shown the rich array of possibilities when researching science and history.

This was such a wonderful week! I had a difficult time saying goodbye to everyone in Manchester and once I reached Leicester I felt lost. It was lovely to constantly engage in intellectual conversations with such great people. I thank everyone involved for making this such a great experience and I hope to see you soon.