

Report

ISECS International Seminar for Early Career Scholars 2014

**Hosted by Manchester University & the John Rylands Library,
for the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
8-12 September Manchester 2014**

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Eighteenth-Century Arts of Communication: in manuscript, in print, in the arts, and in person

This Conference was an immense success. One of the Early Career Scholars called it ‘transformative’. Other compliments included ‘inspiring’, ‘energising’, and a ‘wonderful week’. From that it can be seen that the 14 international Early Career Scholars threw themselves into the experience with admirable gusto, and they all deserve warm praise for their commitment and hard work, combined with conviviality. It was particularly good to share trans-global experiences. The 14 participants came from twelve countries around the world: Canada (1); Denmark (2); India (1); Ireland (1); Italy (1); Japan (1); Portugal (1); Russia (1); Spain (1); Ukraine (1); United Kingdom (2); USA (1). (Sadly, the fifteenth participant, from Russia, was unable to gain a visa in time to attend).

A new feature of the seminar programme was the introductory Workshop on *Presentational and Chairing Skills*. This session was organised as a round-table and proved very successful. It allowed the participants to study explicitly key skills which are often left to be learned implicitly. One result was that the standard of chairing, presentation, and asking questions was excellent

throughout. (Each Early Career Scholar presented a paper and chaired another). In a final round-table session, the participants were asked to reflect upon lessons learned from the Workshop. Their replies included the following points: *Think of the audience's needs; Explain the purpose and structure of your presentation; Be supportive personally but critical intellectually; Don't read a paper mechanically but communicate actively; Speak clearly, especially for international audiences; Remember that seminars are shared experiences between participants, speaker and chair; and Stick to your time!*

The Conference theme was addressed in 14 specialist presentations, plus three keynote lectures. The outcome was a stimulating set of discussions. Specific case-studies included: the changing nature of interpersonal greetings; the role of periodicals; the advent of the novel; the art of close reading; communication by sight and sound in the theatre; theatre design; monarchical play-writing; the use of letters and personal journals; the evasion of letter-writing manuals; the role of laughter and bawdy sociability; the impact of imaginary cross-class and cross-ethnic dialogues; and links between graphic satire and conventional art. Simplistic binaries between 'old' and 'new' were rejected. Instead, complex responses to eighteenth-century commercialisation, urbanisation and, later, industrialisation were detected. Invited in the final session to reflect upon big themes, the participants suggested variously: *the importance of printed texts as a mechanism of change; the role of religion; the use of old works in new ways; big ideas and great thinkers to be understood in context of their social reception; communications from the powerful meet those from people (like women) considered more marginal; the stimulus of dynamic cross-cultural exchanges; plus the power of continuity alongside change.*

Lastly, the contribution of Manchester University needs to be acknowledged with special thanks. The John Rylands Library provided an atmospheric and congenial seminar venue, plus helpful guidance to their special collections. Many colleagues from the University and Library came to

individual sessions. A tour was provided of one of Britain's great industrial heritage sites: the Quarry Bank Mill, with its great water-wheel. In addition, the publishers Gale/Cengage kindly sponsored the opening Reception. The proceedings will be published in the Honoré Champion Éditeur series *Lumières internationales* (Paris), while studies using material in the John Rylands Library may also be considered for the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. Much more to follow, with reiterated congratulations to all the Early Career Scholars.

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