Reflective Essay

The project I’m submitting to the Hannon Library Undergraduate Research Award began in Dr. Dermot Ryan’s *Romantic Genres* class. The original project was a semester-long assignment that involved an oral examination of Charlotte Smith’s *Beachy Head* out of which I got my working research question (What role are pastoral and counter pastoral elements playing in *Beachy Head*?), an annotated bibliography, a literature review, a proposal, a polished draft of the paper, and a final revision of the project after receiving extensive feedback on my original draft. My original thesis departed from the standard reading of *Beachy Head* as a topographical and political poem and focused on the poem’s pastoral and counter pastoral elements. Though I was able to construct an argument using extensive scholarship on Smith, I found that there has been little work done on pastoralism in *Beachy Head*. This semester I’ve been working with Dr. Ryan on an independent study focused on Digital Humanities, which has allowed me to expand and enrich my research on “Beachy Head” through the use of digital tools.

The two primary tools I’ve used to expand my research on *Beachy Head* are *Voyant* and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO). *Voyant* is an online tool that statistically analyzes words in a text. After a series of workshops with Melanie Hubbard, LMU’s Digital Library Programs Assistant, on how to use *Voyant*, I found that *Voyant* helped solidify my thesis. *Voyant* demonstrates the words that appear most frequently in the poem are typical of both pastoralism and counter pastoralism in the 18th century pastoral tradition. While I had already argued this in my paper, *Voyant* acted as another source to support my thesis. It also revealed that throughout the poem these pastoral and counter-pastoral signal words appear in the same sections of the poem as a kind of patterned tension. *ECCO* was extremely helpful when looking further into the historical context of *Beachy Head*. *ECCO* comprises searchable facsimiles of primary texts. I was able to read the full-text primary sources that would have been available to eighteenth-century readers like Charlotte Smith. I also discovered that a key figure in the poem—the Hermit—was actually a historical figure. A keyword search of (Beachy Head) AND (Charlotte Smith) between 1650 and 1800 revealed the hermit figure in one of Charlotte Smith’s prior novels, *Montalbert: A Novel*. Through perusing successive editions of *Montalbert*, I discovered that the hermit disappears from the novel in editions published after *Beachy Head*. Kari Lokke’s recent article on “The Figure of the Hermit in Charlotte Smith’s ‘Beachy Head’” does not discuss *Montalbert* as a source.

Before embarking on my digital project on *Beachy Head*, I spent time with Melanie Hubbard (and later alone) in Special Collections exploring the use and emergence of the codex, the use of illustration and visual cues, and the evolution of information architecture more generally. With this, I gained a better understanding of how information has been organized throughout modern history, which had led me to think about digitalization and the digital tools that I
have been employing not as a leap from print but as the next chapter in how we find our ways through texts. It does not replace previous tools and methods; it adds to them. Further, the exhibit in Special Collections called *Digitally Transformed: Special Collection in the Digital Age* allowed me to see how other scholars at LMU are using technology to enrich their research. While my original paper will be published in the English department’s journal *Criterion*, I have been using one final digital resource, WordPress (dh.lmu.edu) to present the progression of my research, which has forced me to think about audience in a much wider context. Although there is still a lot to learn about Smith’s use of pastoralism in *Beachy Head*, I am confident that the resources the library provides have allowed me to make an original contribution to the academic discussion of Charlotte Smith’s works.