

Seminar

Friday 28 March, 2008

11 am - Room 701

Dr William Tobin

Erskine Visiting Fellow from France

The advantages of rejection

My seminar will be a meander through some of the activities, both academic and non-academic, that have filled my time since retirement two years ago. A unifying theme will be a newly-found pencil drawing of M51, the Whirlpool Nebula, made with Léon Foucault's revolutionary 80-cm diameter silvered-glass telescope in 1862. M51 is an iconic object in astronomy because it is the nebula in which spiral structure was first discovered, in 1845, by Lord Rosse using his 6-foot diameter, metal-mirrored 'Leviathan' telescope. Rosse's drawing was widely reproduced and possibly provided the inspiration for the whorls in the sky of van Gogh's 'Starry night', but the Foucault drawing is more accurate and shows fainter details than any other 19th-century drawing of M51.

Google Book Search, the Internet Archive and numerous other projects are placing burgeoning quantities of 19th-century printed matter on-line. Many of this digitization projects provide full-text search capability. This fantastic new resource for researching the history of science led me to investigate when the 'whirlpool' epithet was first applied to M51. Surprisingly, the astronomical appropriation of 'whirlpool' predates the discovery of spiral structure...and raises the issues of eBay, Abebooks, extraterrestrials and the plurality of worlds.

And the advantages of rejection? If your paper is rejected, you can split it in halves to get two publications in more prestigious journals!

All Welcome

Contact Details

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