

1771, A Literary History: Genre, Origin, and Authorship

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Introduction

The 1771 Project and its Aims

The 1771 Project sought to create a literary history confined to a single year and to three cities through creating an organized database of the wide range of literature circulating at that time. The unique approach of this project is its presentation and analysis of these assorted literatures as a focused representation of the literary, philosophical, and political genres and themes present in the literary scene at the time, in addition to its usefulness in attempting to reconstruct a semblance of daily life in the year 1771.

Methodology

This project was largely carried out through the extensive sorting and categorizing of texts circulated in 1771 that are documented in various online databases, such as the English Short Title Catalogue. Texts and their respective authors were sorted into 100+ genres, including Satires, Comedies, Musical Entertainment, Natural History, Sermons, Didactics, Conduct Books, and much more. The data was further sorted by its ESTC number, the title, the author or printer, gender of author, city, location, category, and, of course, genre. The project created categorized digital inventories of the texts, which allows us to aggregate the available information into approximations of what the literary environments of various cities looked like and the status of certain genre systems in comparison to others.

Sir Roger L'Estrange, 1616-1704



National Portrait Gallery, London

Sir Roger L'Estrange was an English writer best known for his prolific political writing, translations, pamphleteering, and personal involvement in the English Civil War and the Restoration. He utilized his skills in writing to spread his political views and his knowledge of several languages, including Latin, to translate several significant works into English. His English translation of the landmark philosophical Roman work, Seneca's "Morals", helped to popularize classical philosophy in England. His translation was still circulated in 1771.¹

Nicholas Rowe, 1674-1718



National Portrait Gallery, London

Nicholas Rowe was an English dramatist and poet well known for his tragedies and plays, particularly *The Fair Penitent*. He was also well known for editing Shakespeare's plays being recorded as the "first modern editor" of Shakespeare's works.

The Fair Penitent is not only considered to be one of Rowe's most important works, but also an early example of 'domestic' tragedies. Despite being produced in the early 18th century, *The Fair Penitent* continued to circulate in 1771.²

Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745



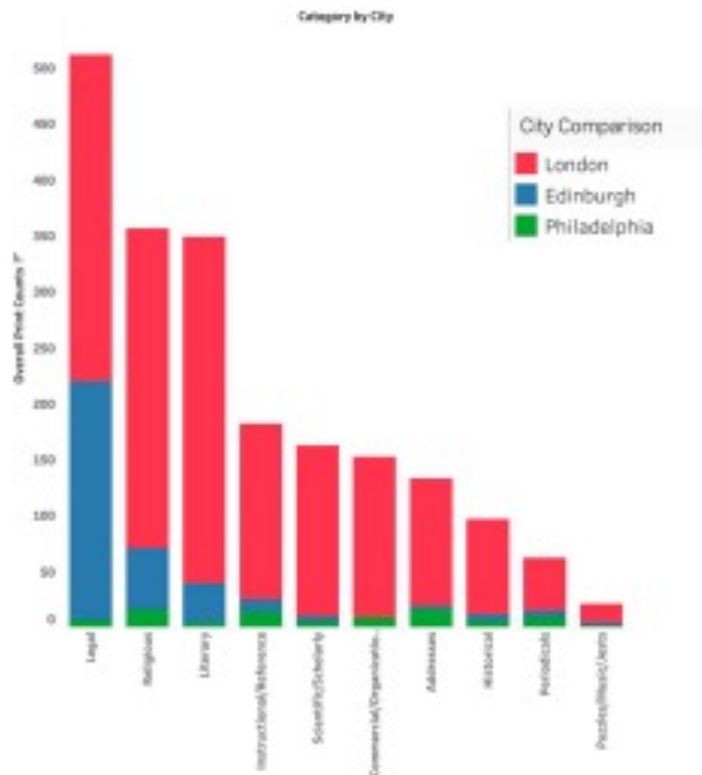
National Gallery of Ireland

Jonathan Swift was a notable Irish satirist and writer who is generally considered to be one of the greatest writers in the English language. His most famous works include *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*, which critique and subvert the social institutions of his time through the use of satire.

Gulliver's Travels, or *Travels into remote nations of the world. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon and then a Captain of several Ships*, was circulating in 1771 despite being around fifty years after publication.³

Why these figures?

All three of these men were deceased by the year 1771, yet some of their most significant works—translations, tragedies, and satires—were still being reprinted. The diversity presented by the genres each author worked in is not exclusive to this sample; in the year 1771, many different types of works were printed for circulation, including political pamphlets, sermons, novels, dramas, legal texts, and songbooks. The kaleidoscope of genres presents not only a surface-level representation of what subjects were circulated in that year, but suggests varied social demographics behind the creation of each variety of writing.



Absolute Category counts by city

10 categories, by prevalence in total

- Legal
- Religious
- Literary
- Instructional/Reference
- Scientific/Scholarly/Critical
- Addresses
- Historical
- Periodicals
- Puzzles/Music/Jests

Conclusions

The purpose of this project was to explore the different facets of the production of works in various literary genres through the documentation and categorization of the biographical and social qualities of the numerous authors behind the analyzed works.

Genre becomes the intangible webbing between the social, temporal, and geographic contexts of writings, as it becomes invaluable in the grouping and analysis of specific texts. By creating separate "genre systems" and approximating the print environments of London, Edinburgh, and Philadelphia through these genre groupings, this project has connected the social and cultural narratives of 1771 to the variations in genre present in that year.

Through this novel approach to digital histories and focus on genre contexts, the 1771 Project has produced a snapshot of the print environment of 1771 and the associated demographics behind its creation.

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³ Probyn, Clive. "Swift, Jonathan." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, September 23, 2004. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26833?rskey=TbERkt&result=3>.