Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Mueller, Martin, and Joseph Loewenstein, co-PIs. EarlyPrint: Curating and Exploring Early Printed English

Andrew Hadfield

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earlyprint.org.

EarlyPrint is an exciting new venture designed to supplement the digital
resources provided by the Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership
(EEBO-TCP). In some ways, I am an out-of-left-field choice of reviewer, as I
am generally bemused by technology. In other ways, I am an obvious choice:
if such resources are of use to someone of my limited IT skills, they must be
genuinely valuable.

The attractive site provides the user with two options: to read and edit
texts (the EarlyPrint Library), or to search and analyze texts (the EarlyPrint
Lab). Clicking on the first option takes the user to a page with instructions on
how to edit the texts and become a co-curator. There is also a link that redirects
you to the "Texts" tab, which is where you will find the site's engine to search the
EEBO-TCP archive. Here, one can search the texts, much like on the EEBO-
TCP site (quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup). To test it out, I brought up the
works of Thomas Nashe and Edmund Spenser and then performed a keyword
search, satisfying myself that "Braggadocio" was indeed a Spenser coinage, and
that the word "dildo" was a refrain in a song, could mean a fool, and took on
its more common meaning in the later 1590s after Nashe's pornographic poem,
A Choice of Valentines, which I have been editing (honestly). I tried the word
"hint," as I have written on that, and the results were similarly rapid, bringing
up the expected mixture of terms that meant "blow" and those that meant
"suggestion." The search engine did seem to be impressively fast and is certainly
much quicker than the one supplied by Historical Texts (historicaltexts.jisc.
ac.uk), which verges on the unusable, and a bit swifter than that accompanying
EEBO.

The "search and analyze" button takes the user to a more compli-
cated screen with four further options: "Catalog Search," "Corpus Search,"
"Discovery Engine," and "Download Texts and Metadata." Beneath this there
is a section marked "Visualizations" with four more buttons: "N-gram Viewer,"
"Bibliographia," "Books per Year," and "Word Counts over Time." The "Corpus
Search" seems to duplicate the searches I carried out under the "Texts" tab, with

a very attractive interface and results again produced at rapid speed. Searching for "Petrarch" yielded a satisfying and impressively long list of hits, as did a search for "Dante." "Red herring" also came up with impressive regularity. The "Download Texts and Metadata" page left me rather puzzled, as strange files full of text script appeared when I tried to find anything, all of which looked like the messy texts you get from Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org), but without the texts anywhere. That may just be me, however. The "Discovery Engine" surely has many uses, but I was not quite sure how to use it. One types in a title of a work and then gets its TCP identification number. So far so good, and I managed this, going for, rather predictably, *The Faerie Queene*, which is assigned the numbers A12777 (1590) and A12778 (1596). The "Discovery Engine" then gives the user a series of almost matching titles, with a tool giving a plus or minus sign to indicate how close the match is. A lot of Spenser's works appear in the list, as do works by Tasso, Du Bartas, Higgins, Turberville, Churchyard, Chaucer, and others. I was not sure how to gage how useful this tool might be for most searches, however.

The "Books per Year" tool is certainly enjoyable to use, giving a bar chart of books published across time. The most productive year is 1642, with almost 400 books making their way into print. Book production first jumps in 1640, when censorship controls were removed, leading to a massive spike as book production quadrupled after a steady and gradual rise from the early sixteenth century. Production settles down in 1644 to about double what had been published before the English Civil War, followed by several peaks in the later seventeenth century that never reach the heights of the early 1640s. "Word Counts over Time" is less revealing and suggests that, within a defined range, the number of words produced did not vary all that much: this in turn indicates that as the number of books increased in busy years, the works themselves were much shorter. Sadly, the "Bibliographia" page was beyond my capacity, though the clusters of coloured dots on the map look nice.

The "N'gram Viewer" is also a valuable tool that surely repays some time dedicated to it. The example the site provides is for the word "love" (with variant spellings), which shows a spectacular peak in usage around 1500 and again around 1518, whole years that surely make the "Summer of Love" of 1967 seem little more than a sideshow. I tried out "war" (with variant spelling "warre"), which suggested a more chaotic picture with peaks in the 1520s, 1540s, and 1560s, something I am at a loss to explain. Were these especially

bellicose times? Henry VIII was at war with France in the 1520s, so that might explain that particular spike. The spike in the 1540s may correspond with the "Rough Wooing," a disreputable historical euphemism for some exceptionally nasty English behaviour towards the Scots ("Bullying Rape" might be more appropriate). The 1560s are more mysterious, as I would have thought these years to have been a bit more subdued, even though everybody was always at war in the early modern period. Maybe this tool will turn up some really interesting data and make us rethink certain historical periods. A search for the term "beggars" also showed a fascinatingly spectacular spike in the 1530s—I have no idea why this might be, but, assuming the data is correct, it is about five times the amount of any other period. Typing in "satire" shows increasing activity between 1560 and 1620, with a peak around 1615. My information may well be inaccurate, and I am not sure I have used the tool as well as I might have done, but exploring n-grams could well tell us a great deal, as authorship scholars and corpus linguists have been telling us for ages.

The site is visually appealing and is easy to navigate, with a number of useful text boxes that can be accessed to explain the various tools and how to use them, which is helpful for the technologically uneducated and/or resistant. Overall, EarlyPrint works really well as a supplement to EEBO-TCP and should be widely used as it is free to access and appears to be well-resourced and, therefore, well-maintained.

ANDREW HADFIELD
University of Sussex
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