

# Toward an Epic Epigraph Graph

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# Outline

*The best ideas are common property.*

Seneca the Younger,  
“On Old Age”, Moral Letters to Lucilius

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The Epigraph Graph
- 3 Conclusions and Future Work

# Introduction

- We present a database of epigraphs
  - ▶ to reveal literary influence
  - as a set of connections between authors
  - over time, space and genre
- Now with epigraphs from over 14,000 literary works
- We are still identifying their provenance.
- Snapshots are released openly as CC BY 4.0  
<http://compling.hss.ntu.edu.sg/projects/epigraph/>  
we plan to put the whole thing into version control

# What is an Epigraph?

- An **epigraph** is a quotation at the beginning of some piece of writing.
- Genette (1987, Ch. 7, pp156–160) identifies four major uses:
  - ▶ commenting on and justifying the title of the work
  - ▶ commenting on the text of the work (the most canonical usage)
  - ▶ claiming a relationship to the cited author (name dropping)
  - ▶ signaling the genre of the work (romantic and gothic authors use more epigraphs, classical and realistic fewer)
- Authors use them both to set the theme and to link their work to the existing body of literature.

# Epigraphs in Literature

- Epigraphs are often discussed within wider literary criticism as a way authors explicitly show their influences (Poplawski, 2017).
- However, to date there has been no large scale quantitative study of who cites whom
- Our large collection makes possible:
  - ▶ To examine influence in the literary field beyond the canon
  - ▶ To study the history of the literary epigraph and its evolution in purpose and form.
  - ▶ To establish the groundwork for an encyclopaedia of literary epigraphs

# The Epigraph Database — The Epigraph

- text of the epigraph
- image of the page it appears on  
or link to online text
- title of original text
- author of original text
- country of origin  
or more detailed region if available
- year of origin
- language of the epigraph
- original language of the epigraph  
if different from the language it is cited in
- medium (novel, play song, ...)
- ISBN of the original text (if it exists)

# The Epigraph Database — The Work

- title
- author(s)
- country of first publication  
or more detailed region if available
- year of first publication
- language of work (all currently English)
- original language of work
- genre
- ISBN (if it exists)
- Remarks (for other information such as whether the cited work is fictional)

# E.g. This paper — the Epigraph

- The best ideas are common property.
- [image of page 1]
- “On Old Age”, Moral Letters to Lucilius
- Seneca the Younger
- 65 AD\*
- Rome\*
- English
- Latin\*
- Letters
- ISBN=9780674990845 (Loeb Classical Library)



# E.g. This paper — the Work

- Toward An Epic Epigraph Graph
- Francis Bond, Graham Matthews
- Miyazaki, Japan
- 2017
- English
- Academic
- ISBN=979-10-95546-00-9

\* shows data that was deduced, rather than explicit in the original. For works such as *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, for which many editions exist, we select any one – the goal is to link to a controlled vocabulary to allow further look up of metadata.

# The Epic Epigraph Graph

- We can think of the works as nodes in a graph
  - ▶ with rich properties
    - genre, author, place, time
- And the epigraph links works
- Making a very sparse graph
  - epic in subject and size
- The meta-data connects the graphs

# Selection Criteria

- Opportunistic (shelf by shelf)
  - ▶ NTU Humanities Library  
Singapore Literature in English Bibliography Koh (2008)
  - ▶ Singapore Public Libraries (7 branches)
- Guided
  - ▶ influential literature from the seventeenth century to the present (based on Wikipedia lists)
  - ▶ Searched in the Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), the Literature Online Database (LION), Google Books, and Project Gutenberg
- Now doing quality control: removing repeat entries, double checking the accuracy of the metadata, and normalizing the data.

# Most Common Sources

# Cites	Work Cited
129	Bible
35	The Tempest
32	Hamlet
23	Paradise Lost
23	Macbeth
22	Romeo and Juliet
20	As You Like It
19	The Book of Counted Sorrows
18	King Lear
15	Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

# Most Common Authors

# Cites	Author Cited
323	Shakespeare, William
74	Dickinson, Emily
62	Poe, Edgar Allan
45	Wilde, Oscar
44	Whitman, Walt
43	Blake, William
37	Nietzsche, Friedrich
36	Carroll, Lewis
35	Thoreau, Henry David
35	Milton, John
34	Emerson, Ralph Waldo
33	Einstein, Albert
22	Twain, Mark

# Most Common Types

# Cites	Type of Work Cited
435	Poem
291	Novel
173	Play
149	Song
73	Proverb
66	Bible Verse
29	Letter
28	Fictional
24	Speech
24	Film
22	Essay
18	Definition of a word

# Most Common Quotes

# Cites	Epigraph Text	Author
6	The past is never dead. It's not even past.	Faulkner, William
5	If an injury has to be done to a man it should be so severe that his vengeance need not be feared.	Machiavelli, Niccolo
5	We shall not cease from exploration And the end of all our exploring Will be to arrive where we started And know the place for the first time.	Eliot, T.S
4	Truth is beautiful, without doubt; but so are lies.	Emerson, Ralph Waldo
4	Hell is empty and all the devils are here.	Shakespeare, William
3	What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.	Aristotle
3	All war is deception.	Sun Tzu
3	If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.	Bacon, Francis
3	Time present and time past Are both perhaps present in time future, And time future contained in time past.	Eliot, T.S

# Authors Play with Epigraphs

The most common works are dominated by the Bible and Shakespeare, and include one originally non-existent work *The Book of Counted Sorrows*: This comes from a young adult series where the author cites poems from a fictional book at the start of each book.<sup>1</sup> Later, the author wrote the book Koontz (2001). Another book cited by the same author, *The Book of Counted Joys*, remains non-existent.



# Authors are Careless

## Variant

*The past is never dead. It's not even past.*

*The past is never dead, it's not even past.*

*The past is not dead. It is not even past.*

*The past is never dead. It isn't even past.*

*The past is not dead; it's not even past.*

*The past isn't over. It isn't even the past.*

## Cited in

cited by 6 authors

Langley Lee (2010)

Carey, Peter (2012)

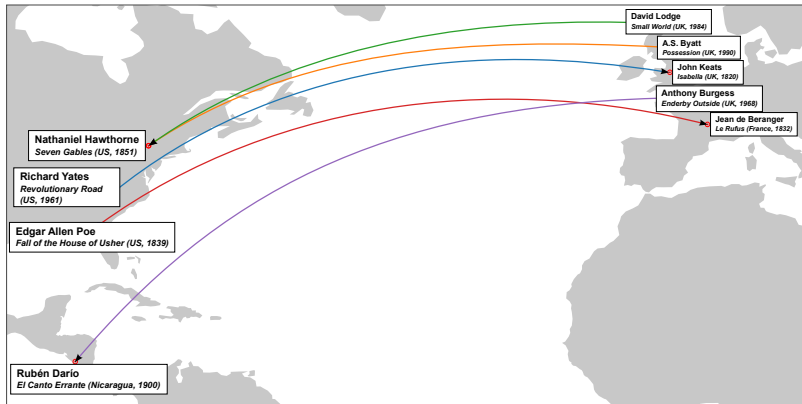
Wolff, Isabel (2014)

Ohanesian, Aline (2015)

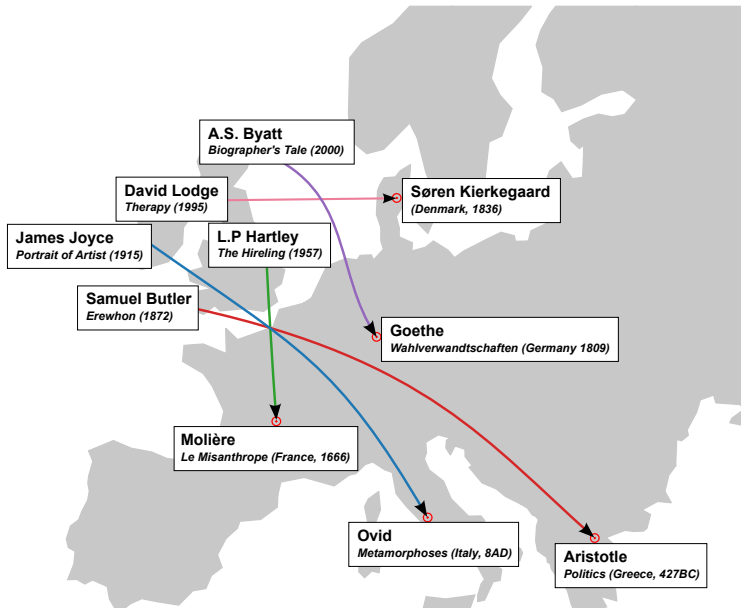
Poulson, Christine (2016)

Differences underlined

# Trans-Atlantic Influence



# Trans-european Influence



# Future Work

- Increase the size to 20,000 epigraphs
- Link to geonames, ISBN, other controlled vocabulary
- On the fly clustering and visualization
  - ▶ show who is cited by British SF authors from 1945-1975
  - ▶ show who cites Dickens
  - ▶ show who cites Russian Realist Writers ???
  - ▶ show who is cited by Singaporean Writers
- Track mis-citations
- Allow additions online

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