
Measuring the Influence of War on 20th Century Literature

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Abstract

We are attempting to present an empirical and analytic approach to the measurement of events on pop culture in a given restricted domain of time. In this paper we will discuss our approach applied to the measurement of the influence of war on popular literature in 20th century America. We will first discuss data collection: methods, standards, and cleaning. Then we will discuss the weighted and normalized popular elements approach for analyzing this data. Finally we discuss our conclusions about the approach, and results of the project.

I. INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, pop culture has been heavily shaped and molded by current events. There are movies like *Saving Private Ryan*, songs like *We Didn't Start the Fire*, and books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* that have roots in events that were happening around and before the time.

We want to investigate this problem and develop an approach that measures the extent to which pop culture has been influenced by current events — World War II is obviously influential, but how much so? Is it more influential than World War I, or the Great Depression? The original goal was to be able to develop this measurement for any type of historical event over any period of time, however that task was too big to be within the scope of what we can accomplish over the course of this class, so we narrowed our problem to measuring the influence of wars on literature. In order to obtain this measurement we break the problem up into three discrete steps: data preprocessing, analysis of the data, and interpretation of the analysis.

II. GATHERING THE DATA

One of the biggest hurdles in this project was finding appropriate datasets. While there are many different datasets on movies, books, and music out there, it was very difficult to find large enough datasets with parameters that allow us to perform searches on what topic some given media was on. For example, while *Saving Private Ryan* could be categorized as a war movie by its title alone, *Wings* gives no hint that it's a war movie from the title. To be explicit, our data needed to have the following qualities

- Large size
- Publication date
- Topic information

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